HUNTERS OF HEAVEN

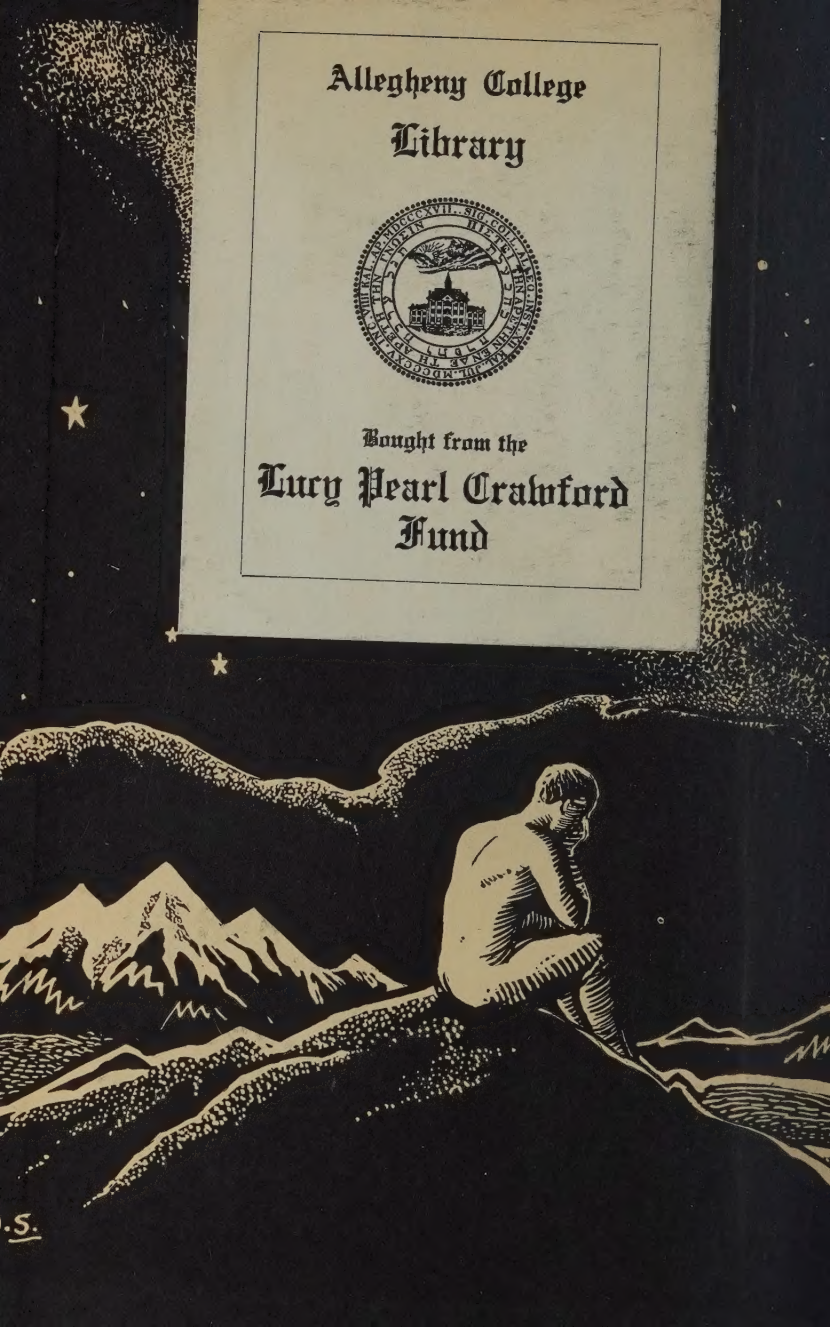
THE AMERICAN SOUL AS REVEALED BY ITS POETRY



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HUNTERS OF HEAVEN



THE COPPER-COLORED HEAVEN

"The horse with the star forehead now slowly gains upon me."

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HUNTERS *of* HEAVEN

THE AMERICAN SOUL AS REVEALED BY ITS POETRY

By CLEMENT WOOD

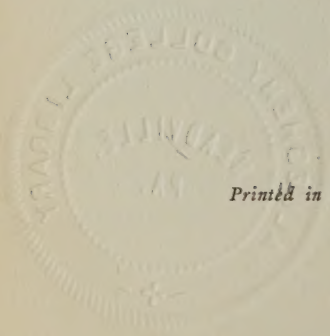
Author of "The Craft of Poetry," "Poets of America," etc.



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To
GLORIA GODDARD,
MY HEAVEN

37709

Heaven but the Vision of fulfilled Desire.

—RUBAIYAT *of Omar Khayyam, rendered by* EDWARD FITZGERALD.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.

—REVELATIONS, xxi, i.

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HUNTERS OF HEAVEN

I

THE COPPER-COLORED HEAVEN

This is a travel book, telling the wanderings of men's most adventurous spirit into the coast regions of that fairest of all visitable spots, that land of heart's desire and mind's mapping called heaven.

The visible globe has become man's park and playground. We are used to books recording strange adventurings into its most inaccessible places. Throughout this world are the continents and seas, the stars and universes, of man's thought, and the wilder regions of his desires.

We are all travelers and explorers in these airy realms. The joy of entering upon and conquering these domains is unequaled. We shall find that a group of human sensitives, the poets, have, as a rule, been before us in every nook and cranny of this land that we may visit. This book is their travel book into various heavens: it may be our travel guide as well.

George Sterling has *The Black Vulture*—

> Unwitting now that envious men prepare
> To make their dream and its fulfillment one.

It is the dream that builds the heaven; and this gains importance to us, because of the fulfillment.

Heaven is the vision of fulfilled desire. It is visited first as a vision of what we would have to-morrow be. To-morrows come; and some of the heavens are achieved: settle down quietly on earth, with a rain of desires gained, not always to the heart's satisfaction. Out of this vision the wise man can even picture dimly what to-morrow will be. A knowledge of to-day's heaven is an insurance against being caught without an umbrella in a rainy to-morrow; an insurance against being burdened with one, in a cloudless future.

How do heavens come? How are they engendered, born? How do they grow, and sag down to be actual earth and living? Science tells us much about this.

The simplest cell, the first seed of animal life, has a body, the organized matter that composes it.

This body may be sensed by our intermittent senses: it may be weighed, measured, have its temperature taken, its specific gravity ascertained.

The simplest cell has also a soul, science reports, if we pare that down to its core meaning of vital principle, the seat of the emotions, the body's desires.

The soul need not be breathed into the animal from without, by some god's restrained exhalation; it may breed from the body's self, and be but a phrasing of the innate need for absorbing parts of the environment, that life may have its little fluid hour in the unconcerned sun.

No man—no animal—finds the environment wholly to his liking: not even the mouse in a mountain of cheese, the fly in a lake of honey. It remains always an unknown land, with the desiring soul wishing to shape it closer to the heart's desire. To aid in this shaping, he adds, subtracts, multiplies, divides, and otherwise wish-handles what of the environment has come his way, inside his own being, and builds a dream picture of his surroundings as he would have them be. This, in the most advanced forms of life, we may call heaven.

The ameba, the paramecium, the wall-less typhoid fever bacillus even, have their own constricted heavens. But they have no eloquence to pierce our senses; their heaven remains their own, a dumb locked dream to the rest of us.

Men are different. They wish, they desire: life is merely the sum of past desires building its new ones, and seeking the gold or fool's gold of achievement. They desire, and they utter these desires.

The brain has developed as a tool to bring these dreams nearer. The soul is the sum of these desires. Heaven is their fantastic blueprint of what they would have the next moment, and all moments to follow, blossom into.

These desires are uttered, falteringly and stutteringly. At

first, a mere animal cry, wordless, uninterpretable. Later come words; which, as the desire heats toward fulfillment, actual or imagined, throb into a pulse and a rhythm that, as a vehicle for words, produces that heart-speech that we call poetry.

Poetry is the emotionalized throbbing utterance of the desires of the utterer. If this desire is shared by the hearer, the utterance becomes poetry to him.

Prose may more casually bound a cooler, less impassioned vista of the desired heaven; but poetry, as it mounts toward its white peaks, is the deep calling unto the vast outside.

In the poetry of a land, the songs of individuals accepted and heart-enshrined by the general, we have the nearest phrasing of what the land desires: the land, that is, as embodied in its people.

Desires bud into actions, if the desires are deep enough and continuing enough. To-day is built of a canceling-out blend of yesterday's wishes; to-morrow, of to-day's. Exhume unborn to-day in yesterday's poetry; and, if you will, in this book read to-morrow in to-day's poetry. It is the door that swings partly open on the heaven confined within the faintly seen to-morrow.

> Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight,
> Make me a child again, just for to-night!
> Mother, come back from that echoless shore,
> Take me again to your heart, as of yore.

Some life-racked, youthsick individual first wrote this: America took it to its heart, and the realm of outgrown childhood became one of the continents of the American heaven.

> Whereto answering, the sea,
> Delaying not, hurrying not, . . .
> Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death.

> Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,
> If the Camels don't get you, the Fatimas must—

Walt Whitman and the popular song uniting in hymning death as another vast domain in America's heaven.

All poetry expresses wishes, whether it is worded as wish, or statement of the future, or of the present. All of these are wishes:

I want to be an angel. . . .

I'm to be queen of the May. . . .

The splendor falls on castle walls.

And there are so many poets, saying so many different things: the jargon of tongues at Babel was a violin solo, compared to the myriad-pieced orchestra of poetry's word. How are we to find our way about in this bewildering universe of discordant hurly-burly?

This writer, in *A Star Comes Singing*, sought to divide the things men seek into the desire for food, the desire for love, the desire for death:

Man drives restlessly over earth's surface
Whipped by the primal goads—hunger, and love. . . .
Out of hunger have come vast fields and factories,
And belts of steel to bind the girth of the world,
Ships, cities, and markets, customs and sciences;
And ever with it, out of love, the home life, . . .
And out of both have grown
The final winter of civilizations,
The entomber, war.

Seared by these punishing whips, . . .
Art flings his iridescent glamor over dumb things,
Making them eloquent. . . .

Godlike forms are fantasied. . . .

Man even spans the threshold of the unspannable void. . . .
He dares to pilfer pitiful fragments of the reason of things,

This tiny piece claiming to understand
The limitless machine of which it is a part.
He builds . . . dizzy philosophies.
The spiraling earth climbs higher;
His dizzy structures topple, his clouds dissolve. . . .

At last his calloused back is lashed no more.
He . . . dissolves in the clear solution death,
And again is one with restless rock and soil.

This is ampler: desires for food and shelter, for love, home life and war, art, religion, knowledge in the form of philosophy and science, and war. But this is a poet speaking.

Let us let the social scientist classify the wishes for us. Just as the earth has been pigeon-holed into five oceans and six continents; each continent into so many countries; each country into so many states, counties, divisions, and so on.

There are,

(i) the wishes essential to life: first the preservative wishes, including the desires for food, clothing, shelter, and the like;

(ii) And the reproductive wishes, ranging from direct physical love between the sexes, and eccentric expressions of this,

(iii) To the vaguer loves of parent or of child, of kindred, of countrymen, of men in general, of nature.

(iv) There are, next, the non-essential wishes: first the esthetic ones, seeking beauty;

(v) The emotional or moral wishes, seeking the good, including religion; and—

(vi) The intellectual wishes, desiring facts, wisdom, the truth.

(vii) Lastly, there is the underlying wish of all, the homesick wish for a return to youth, to the uncivilized wilds, to the mother, to the original lifelessness, or death.

This seven-fold division will give us a road-map through the singing labyrinth. We will never forget it.

Rock Me to Sleep, Mother, the selection from Whitman, and *Ashes to Ashes* come under the last division. Such a witty gem as:

Doctor Jones fell in the well
And dies without a moan;
He should have tended to the sick,
And let the well alone

obviously expresses a hearty desire that one or all medical practitioners, who have apparently not endeared themselves to the singer, find a constricted watery bucket to kick. So all poems, all verse even, will slide into its proper slot in the whole.

Let us take the trip. Let us wander through all the American heavens, from the first: to gain a better understanding of to-day, and a clearing picture of to-morrow.

Come, poets of America, and unlock your dusted tongues. You had something to say: some desire that itched your soul and your tongue until you spit it out, in sagging meter or soaring melody. What did our land dream yesterday? What is its massive will dreaming to-day, to harvest so soon that we may see the fruit even now veering from furtive green to scarlet or utter gold?

In the beginning . . . let us start with America's earliest poets. Come let us hill-mount above them, and survey the heaven the continent uttered first.

What is the word of your song, you copper-hued first human dwellers on our continent? Will it be of the Asian home you left; of the slow growth of your skill in catching the salmon that spawn in the Columbia, in felling the snorting hordes of bison that thronged the printed plain; of your far-off discovery of the cherished maize, that prisons more of the sunlight than any other food man has discovered? Will it be of the stir beneath your ribs as you catch sight of a stirred woman, of the frozen rigor as the lurking enemy is sighted, all unsuspecting? What is your word? Our ears are at your tombs: the tombs vestibuled for you by our red greed.

A faint far-off clangor, a chorus of harsh gutturals and melting liquids. . . .

Louder—we can not distinguish—

It is louder now, but as unclear as a cyclone day. Even if it were a Niagara of sound, or even a single trumpet call loud enough to shake Tacoma from its lavic base, it would be sound only.

You speak a different language, then?

You can not even understand the question! Your disbodied spirit stands as aloofly silent as the wooden cigar-store Indian weathering dustily in the abandoned rear of a curio shop.

How, then, are we to give you your hour again upon the troubled air? You may have a word of interest for us. . . .

Only by letting your word filter through our own minds and tongues. And the mind stains what it touches, and the tongue never forgets its warping tricks.

—There was an English tavern named, for eighth Henry's resplendent victory, *The Boulogne Gate;* soon enough duller minds and twisting tongues rendered it *The Bull and Gate,* with wide-eyed legends of a vast bull leaping a convenient gate. French explorers in Texas named a river *le Purgatoire,* since the region resembled the local station just beyond hell; their American successors came no nearer to this than the river's present name, the *Picketwire,* aptly explained as due to the zigzag flow.—

We will listen, first of all, to our own approximations of the Amerindian song, rendered as truly as we can give them. We must not forget that it is the Bull and Gate and the Picketwire that speak, rather than the vanished earlier words.

i.

What do we hear of the simplest cry of life: the yearning for food, for clothing, shelter, a cosy environment?

Who is this, lifting his song of snowtime from the Piute? This is no single man, but a composite of all the singers, of all the tribe. We are not dealing now with individual poets, except in one instance, but with folkpoetry, the unnamed, unfathered song of a whole people. This puddingstone of a person sings:

O, for a long, long season
The snow has possessed the mountains.

The deer have come down, and the big-horn,
They have tracked the sun to the south
To munch mesquite pods and the bunch grass. . . .

O, for a long, long season
We have chewed *chia* seeds
And dried venison of the summer killing. . . .

We are sick with our longing for the sun
And the green grass rippling on the mountain.

The green banquet, and the deer and big-horn it attracted, are not vital to our life; instead of shrunk seeds and shrivelled pemmican, there is the corner delicatessen, with the best Philadelphia scrapple, appetizing roast pork, chicken, beef, turkey, and ham, luring coffee-cake and stollen, whipping cream, whatever the jaded fancy craves. The Indians lacked delicatessen stores. Primitive nomads, hunting in season, and, out of season, existing on seeds and sundried flesh—the craving for the summer sun again is what was to be expected.

Here is a hunting charm from the Navaho:

The deer comes to my singing. . . .
From the Black Mountain,
From the very crest,
Down the trail, coming, coming now, . . .
Starting with his left fore-foot,
Stamping, the frightened deer turns. . . .
My prey, I shine
In the luck of the chase.
The deer comes to my singing!

This is poetry, and not a true confession. The charm-song is not supposed to say that the deer has actually come, any more than "Give us this day our daily bread" is meant as a receipt for a delivery from the bakery. What it says is that the hunter wants the deer to come, to turn frightened, to stumble headlong with the death-wound, to fragrance the forest ways with his broiling

savor. It is all wish-fulfillment, to return to the solemn word of the mind-scientists; based on the savage belief that the environment would curl up and die when man willed this and said it—a belief based on a substratum of granite fact. What man dreams, he often goes out and achieves. Things don't happen; man happens them.

So the San Carlos Apache chanted to the unseen deer:

> At the south,
> Where the white shell ridges of the earth lie, . . .
> We two shall meet.

The woodland Chippewa, a different prey in mind, roared their charm-song to the bison:

> Strike
> our land
> with curved horns!

The Dakota phrased their hunting charm like an obituary notice:

> Something I've killed, and I lift up my voice. . . .
> The northern bison I've killed, and I lift up my voice.

And again,

> Strap on the saddle,
> Dear children;
> For half a day
> I will kill!

Far in the future the hour when men hunted big game in armored tanks, with machine-guns.

The Pima of the southwest gave this word to the intended prey:

> I ate the thornapple leaves,
> And the leaves made me dizzy.

I drank the thornapple flowers,
And the drink made me wabbly.
The hunter, Bow-remaining,
He overtook and killed me,
Cut and threw my horns away, . . .
Cut and threw my feet away.

We moderns omit to place such pleasant laments in the lips of our intended viands. Again, the black-tailed deer is made to sing, by the Pima:

What horse is trying to catch me?
The horse with the star forehead
Now slowly gains upon me.

This last edition racing note expressed the wish of the hunter, and hardly the yearning of the deer. Hunting man was not interested in what the deer wanted; he sought a bellyful of venison, and so he puffed out these fantastic yielding charms, to hoodoo his prey.

So much for the Indians in the hunting stage—a mood that survives in us, as game laws and boardwalk shooting-galleries alike attest. When we reach the farming stage, the symphony is ampler. The Omaha had an elaborate corn ritual: Indian corn, or maize, was as important to the copper-faces as handshaking to a politician.

Listen! The corn is talking. . . .
My roots lie fourfold deep down in the land;
I stand here, robed in green, bearing fruit.
Harvest me and eat me; I give life for life!
Shout with joy, dance and sing with all living things!

There is a ritual for planting the grains, for the growth of the stalks, for the coming of the fruit, for the harvesting:

The ears we pluck are ripe, the corn we eat bursts with juice.

The Luiseño have a woman's song, containing—

Wherever women are found
There the grinding-stone sits;
Wherever men are found
There the hunting-knife gleams,

pointing to the blending zone between the hunting and the farming cultures. The Osage corn-planting song follows its own pattern:

I have made a footprint, a sacred one.
I have made a footprint; through it the blades push upward.

The opening half-line is repeated nine times more, with the ears appearing on the stalk, the harvesting, and the resultant whoopee in the tepee. The Tesuque Pueblo have their corn-grinding song, almost as ornate as rococo Gothic:

This way from the East
The cloud comes,
Very white,
And inside the cloud is the white corn.
How beautiful is the cloud
Bringing corn glowing white!

This is a regular rainbow of a song. The North takes the air with a blue cloud bearing blue corn; the West, a yellow cloud with its tawny harvest; the South, a red cloud, with its blushing kernels. The clouds, used here to represent the rain, are the corn-bringers.

The Zuni blue corn dance is similar. Their corn-grinding song begins with a warbled gloat to the rainbow, which marks the end of the rainy season; and again points to the close connection between rain, in the arid copper home, and the maizy harvest of the drenched earth. Rain and corn, in Indian singing, are twins with very Siamese parents.

The Hopi Indians pay tribute to the butterflies and wild bees, those marriage-brokers whose pandering junkets cause the corn

to swell; and to the pelting rain, that makes the growth possible; and to the patches of beans in flower, among the heavily fruiting stalks.

The Pueblo basket-dancers' song is a fertility rite, invoking the rain. The Rio Grande Pueblos sing:

> People of the middle heaven
> Moving happily behind white floating cloud-masks,
> Moving busily behind rain-straitened cloud-masks;
> Lightning-people,
> Thunder-people,
> Rainbow-people,
> Give rain! rain! rain!

Here the forces of the rain are bodied into a convention of wet gods. Early man knew that, when he sprinkled water over a companion or over the bushes from a pool or creek, he himself did the sprinkling; and he imagined naturally that, when the sky turned on its shower, some Indian greater than he must live up there, to achieve this damp miracle. Religion has one of its taproots here. . . .

The Navaho rain-chant is simpler, the expression of a wish similar to the hunting charms:

> As far as man can see,
> The rain comes,
> The rain comes with me.

Not that the rain had come; but the primitive poet felt that his saying this meteorological observation often enough would make it rain. What I tell you three times is true, said the Bellman in the saga of the Snark; Coué, the repetitive French healer, recently broadcast the paralyzed old belief. Of course, if it were repeated long enough, it would coincide with the coming of the rain; for rain, sometime in the future, is as certain as a normal woman's ultimate Yes.

The priests of the Sia are invoked,

Let the white floating clouds

and all the tearful machinery of heaven
Come and work for us, and water the earth.

The Pima sing hopefully:

Hi-iya naiho-o! The earth is rumbling
From the beating of our basket drums, . . .
Everywhere humming.
Hitciya yahina-a.
Earth is rumbling, everywhere raining,
Hitciya yahina-a.

This shows even the sacred formula of the incantation. The Hopi sing their flute song for the heavenly balm:

Hail, fathers, hail! . . .
From the four world-points upstarting,
The rain shall come here.

The four world-points . . . the four corners of the earth . . . the same old illusion is found in the Hebrew sacred texts, and in many places more. The Navaho itemize their insistent wish:

From the tops of the great corn-plant
the water gurgles; I hear it.
Around the roots it foams; I hear it.

This is all very well, for dry localities; but what about the Northwest coast, which is overflooded with rain? Here the Tsimshian pray to their god Nexnox,

Pull up your foot
and sweep off your face!

That is, stop the rain, and take away the clouds. Man's desire, his song, his soul, his heaven, are all built of his needs.

We may just as well leave these weather notes, and see what else the song says about food.

Here is a Chippewa singing:

Maple sugar
is the only thing
that satisfies me.

Evidently this tribe had the sugar-maple tree; but whether the Indians learned the sweet virtues of the sap from the colonists, or the reverse, the song does not say. A hungry Tlingit bard, from the Northwest, insinuates slily,

We are also going to be invited
to Killisnoo.
High-caste people
are going to eat.

Another Tlingit bard moons—and the colonial influence is more obvious here:

What do you think I live for?
I live to drink whiskey.

There are songs of despair, for life was not all maple sugar and whiskey to the Indians. Here is one, from the Washoe-Piute:

Truly, buzzards
Are circling around my sky! . . .
Meanness, betrayal, and spite
Descend in a flock,
To teach me
Of sickness and death inside me.
My sky is loud with the dreadful sound
Of the wings of failures.

There is a Northwest song from the Chinook:

Ya, that is good! . . .
That worthless woman
 does not like me. . . .
I was very unhappy
 with my wife
 in Victoria.
Nobody
 said good-day to us
 in Victoria. . . .
Never mind, if I die
 now soon.

Here is an Eskimo with a unique complaint against the thaw:

Ajaja, this great water
 has spread over the ice.
I cannot walk
To the rock across there,

followed by other dolorous laments. A Chippewa sings that the only thing he is afraid of is the wind; but more often the song is hopeful, as in the Navaho dedication of the new house, the fire, the doorway. The Navaho night chant excels the conclusion of Job,

Beautifully my fire—

my possessions, my soft goods, hard goods, horses, sheep, old men, old women, young men, women, children, wife, chiefs, country, fields, house,

—are restored to me.

A memorial ode composed in 1884 by Chief John Buck of the Iroquois was a bit more critical:

Now, listen, you who established the Great League.
Now it has become old,
Now there is nothing but wilderness.

You who established it are in your graves;
You have taken it with you, and have placed it under you,
And there is nothing left but desert. . . .
We are diminished; . . .
We have become wretched. Woe!

The fragmentary saga of the Leni-Lenape, among the Delawares, is a more glowing account of a trek from a frigid stormy land to a land flowing, if not with cod-liver oil and Socony, at least with bison. A cradle song from the Haida of the Northwest contains this mourn for the never-existing imaginary good old days:

It is not now as it was in the olden times.
Even slaves are beginning to own good abalone-shells!

And this ends the first note. . . . Hope for success in the chase, charms for the rain to swell the corn, a prayer against over-rain, praise of maple sugar, whiskey, and great feasts, melancholy laments, a charm for a new house, surveys of a world going to the Indian dogs. . . . The attitude is almost always tribal, rather than individual. A man does not pray for success over his fellows; or for destruction on rich oppressors. There is not even a grouch evident against the whites.

Ah, but we get this from the minds and tongues of the whites. Part of the song may be silenced forever.

ii.

Man was not made to live alone: women see to that.

When the sap drums upward from root through bole to the outermost twig-tip, when the halberdiers of grass and herb prick the long continence of the warming air, when birds strut and trill their come-hitherings and branches crash with the leaping love-chase of the horny haired ones, then man seeks him a maid.

We hear a croon from the Ojibwa:

My canoe glides out on the lake,
Paddle dipping softly, so that she may not be frightened.
Somewhere along the shore she has hidden herself,
Shy to surrender to love's charms.
Ah, my desire will win, I know. . . .
There she is!

The pursuit is on. The desiring maid is masked in a mock-shyness that whips up the man's desire. Love, desire will win. . . .

Here is the first movement of the Zuni Blanket Song, a wooing chant—or, at least, one of the six identical sixths of it:

O, what happiness!
How delightful
When we walk together
Beneath one blanket.

The Ojibwa croon sang of love's charms. Love-charms were frequent, as in this hopeful Winnebago cantrap:

Whomever I look upon,
He becomes love-crazed.
Whomever I speak to,
He becomes love-crazed.
Whomever I whisper to,
He becomes love-crazed.
All men who love women,
I rule them, I rule them. . . .
Whomever I touch,
He becomes love-crazed.

This seems to be a woman's love-incantation; though there were strange loves, fostered of the adolescent moon, known too to the Indians. This little Ojibwa song is more obviously a woman's charm:

What are you saying to me?
I am robed like the roses,
and as beautiful as they.

So far, the love-chase, as revealed by most of these charms, has been of the desiring maid, rather than the man hot in pursuit. This Ojibwa charm might be for either:

O, I am thinking . . .
I have found
My lover.
O, I think it is so.

Here is a Cherokee love-cantrap clearly for the sex that later ascended to trousers:

There in Elahiyi you are at rest, a white woman.
No one is ever lonely when with you.
You are most beautiful.
Instantly you have made me a white man. . . .
Now you have made the path white for me. . . .
It shall never become blue.

You have brought down to me, from above, the white road. Don't be bewildered, don't be misled. This is not a plea for crossing the two races; or a wish that two of the tawny forest lovers blanch to pale-faces. In the Cherokee speech, white meant happy—no more, no less; blue meant despondent—as it does in our speech. We play with colors similarly. We speak of a red: most of our hearers youthfully visualize a Bolshevik. When we call a man yellow, we disprize his courage. We have our brown study, our black ingratitude, our blue funk; we depress into the blues, or dance to their jazzy melancholia. The Cherokee lover here, then, merely says that his sun-hearted woman has lit his heart from its despondency, and has opened up to him the road to happiness above . . . the road into heaven.

The lover proceeds:

Where other men live, it is lonely.
They are loathesome to me.
The skunk has made them his brothers; they are fit only
for his company. . . .

The seven clans all alike make me feel very lonely in
their company. . . .
But I—I was ordained to be a white man. . . .
Your soul has come into the center of my soul, never to
turn away.
I, Gatigwan asti—I take your soul.
Sge!

Another Cherokee love-charm includes:

This woman's soul has come to rest at the edge of your body.
You are never to let go your hold upon it. . . .
Let her never think of any other place. . . .
She is bound by the black threads.

A song from the Haida, of Queen Charlotte's Island, paints the lady like a flowering glacier:

She is beautiful, this woman,
As the mountain flower;
But she is cold, cold,
Like the snowbank
Behind which it blooms.

There is this Rabelaisian song of a medicine man, from a more southerly tribe:

A maid in the hut is good
In the undark nights in summer,
When her sides are slender and brown,
And you prove her by her laughter.

So far, this is what we might have expected. The closing couplet is different:

But the love of man to man
Has mighty works to prove it.

This, in the English mind that rendered it, clearly was not to be taken in the Socratic sense. But the Indians, the men's faces feminined into an absence of beard, with strange ways of harvesting minions, knew their own minds.

This Papago love song clearly swings back to the normal:

Do you long, my girl,
For bisnaga blossoms
To slip in your hair?
I will pick them for you.
What are bisnaga spines to me,
Whom love is forever pricking in the side?

Here is an evocative glyph from the Washoe-Piute, showing a leaning toward romantic love—that love that is satisfied by the mere presence, or the thought even, of the beloved one, instead of only by clipping and tumbling:

A girl wearing a green ribbon,—
As if it had been my girl.
—The green ribbon I gave her for remembrance—
Knowing all the time that it was not my girl,
Such was the magic of that ribbon
Suddenly
My girl existed inside me!

Even in sleep, love's fitful fever irked:

Often from unremembering sleep
I wake delicately glowing.
Now I know what my heart has been doing.

This lovely Shoshone song rounds out the skeleton picture:

Neither spirit nor bird;
That was my flute you heard
Last night by the river.
When you came with your wicker jar

Where the river drags the willows,
Wacoba, Wacoba,
Calling, Come to the willows!

Neither the wind nor a bird
Rustled the lupine blooms.
That was my blood you heard
Answering your garment's hem
Whispering through the grasses;
That was my blood you heard
By the wild rose under the willows.

That was no beast that stirred,
That was my heart you heard,
Pacing to and fro
In the ambush of my desire,
To the music my flute let fall.
Wacoba, Wacoba,
That was my heart you heard
Leaping under the willows.

And here is an even lovelier strain from the same tribe:

Come not near my songs,
You who are not my lover,
Or from out that ambush
My heart leaps upon you!

When my songs are glowing
As an almond thicket
With the bloom on it,
My heart lies in ambush
In the midst of my singing;
Come not near my songs,
You who are not my lover! . . .
Or from out my singing
My heart leaps upon you!

Yet recall that this comes to us through a white American mind and brain and heart. The romantic beauty may be Indian at core; it may be a prettifying of the rugged seed. Samuel Johnson rephrasing a longshoreman's oath.

There are songs of love's yielding; of faithless love; of faithful love, like this Algonquin's bride's song:

> There are many men in the world,
> But only one is dear to me.
> He is good and brave and strong.
> He swore to love no one but me.
> He has forgotten me.
> It was an evil spirit that changed him,
> But I will love no one but him.

This "woman's" song was perhaps written by a man, who wished his going to rouse up this disquiet in his woman's heart. A Chinook song, from the Northwest coast, rings truer:

> I don't care
> if you desert me.
> Many pretty boys are in the town.
> Soon I shall take another one.
> That is not hard for me!

Separation, that Lethe stream for myriads of complaints and quarrels that foul love's face, even today, evoked constant songs; Indian poetry never realized that it was a healthily inconvenient cure for monogamous love's monotony. An Abanaki song from the Eastern woodlands sounds like a liberal prosing of Burns:

> My parents' commands are vain;
> I and the girl I love
> Shall see each other while the world lasts.
> Let them say or do what they like;
> We shall see each other while the rocks stand.

A Tenasa song, from the Mississippi region, queries:

Tiakens, you build a house,
You bring a wife to live in it. . . .

By what name is your bride known?
Is she beautiful?
Are her eyes as soft as the moonlight?
Is she a strong woman?
Did you understand her signs as she danced to you?

This last line is kin to the pandering voodoo dance of Haiti, with its African background; and points again to Indian love as intrinsically a matter of the body's sweet rut.

The man who stays away from war to be with his bride is jeered at for his luxuriousness, in another song. There is a callous sheik's cynicism in this Chippewa lyric:

You desire vainly
that I seek you.
The reason is,
I come
to see your younger sister.

A Tewa elegy promises love after death:

My little breath, we used to sit under the willows by the waterside,
And there the yellow cottonwood bird came and sang.
I remember that, and so I weep. . . .
Ah, how long ago it was
That we two walked in that pleasant way. . . .
O, my little breath, now I go there alone
In sorrow.

The malady called jealousy, that plague of many minds, poked its green eyes out of this *Black Prayer:*

There is a woman
Who has taken my man from me.

How was I to know,
When I gave him my soul to drink
In the month of Corn Planting,
When the leaves of the oak
Are furred like a mouse's ear,
And the moon curls like a prayer plume
In the green streak over Tyuonyi—

When I poured my soul into his
In the midst of my body's trembling,
How was I to know
That the soul of a woman was no more to him
Than sweet sap, dripping
From a wind-broken bough? . . .

So I made black prayers for that woman. . . .
May all her days be night-haunted;
Let blackness come upon her. . . .

I wish I had kept my soul,
Even though I gave my body.
The sly laugh and the pointed finger
Are better than this endless nibbling at my soul
By a light woman.

A white American woman transmits this; and, for all its beauty, it may be stained by her and her race's attitudes. Light woman. . . . and there are Pima songs containing,

Prostitutes come running here,
Holding blue flowers as they run,
Talking in whispers. . . .
With flowers crowned upon their heads.

Evidently this old profession complicated the love-scheme.

One of love's eccentricities is the desire to inflict cruelty, as a lash to love; even to gloat over bloodshed, as a stimulus to desire. Here is a Pima war-strain:

Among the rocks of the mountains
The women tried to hide themselves;
But the men ran and killed them.

This mood appears more at length in the odd Eskimo ballad of the girl Sednor and the magician, the Fulmar. She has been abducted, in a forced mating, by the magician. Her father tries to rescue her, riling the necromancer, and awakening his terrible servants the hostile winds. Her father cowers from death:

He pushes his daughter into the sea.
She clings to the boat on both sides.
(Still the Fulmar followed!)
He struck her with a knife; whales emerged.
Again he struck her; a thong seal emerged;
Again he struck her; a fiord seal emerged. . . .
She leaned her whole body,
(Sednor, fearing death!)
He stabbed her with a knife into the eyes;
He killed her.

(Thus the Fulmar, the magician.)

Her father lifted her up to the shore.
He took a quilt; he laid her down on the beach. . . .
The flood-tide took her.

The poet sings this, because a part of him gloats over the cruelty of it; the people enjoy it, because they pulse to the same blood-lust.

The Pima Wars of the People has Elder Brother, the hero with whom all identified themselves, go with the people to slay Hâ-âk, the female monster; whom Jung would identify as the terrible mother—that is, the over-loved mother, half-seen by the desire-entangled son as a thing to destroy, to free himself from the delayed soul-weaning. Thus Hiawatha destroys the Mishe-Nahma, the fish monster, after being swallowed by it; and the terrible magician Megissogwon, representing the terrible mother. These point to the fact that the Indian did not escape from that

withering over-fondness for the mother that paralyzes much of manhood. But, as clearly, he revolted healthily against this.

In the love song, then, we have the man's desire for the woman, and hers for the man—a love that makes all other human beings loathsome in the lovers' eyes. We have a faint, and faintly suspicious, foreshadowing of romantic love; mournings at separation, jealousy, cynical taunts over desertion, scorn of the undesired woman, lament of a lover at his love's death, cruelty, a fugitive hint of love of man to man, a recoil from the overloved mother. There is no hint given of problems arising out of matings of white and copper-colored; little of marital unhappiness; little of self-love, and the stranger eccentricities of civilized affection. So far the Indians went. . . .

iii.

Love of parents, children, kindred, tends to expand into a sense of world-brotherhood; and expands further from the difficult feeling that we are brothers to all men, out to the emotion of remoter cousinship to the hippopotamus, the canary, the mouse-louse, the stinging nettle, the searing red of the lava flow, and the farthest gipsying flick of stardust. To reach this last attitude requires considerable emotional and imaginative gymnastics. The Indians lost neither sleep nor waking over it.

There are faint strains of love for children, as in this Haida song:

Dogs, even,
when they have pups,
give to them their love.
That is why
I love mine.

The same tribe gives us this tabloid saga of fraternal esteem:

Let me shoot a small bird
for my younger brother.
Let me spear a small trout
for my younger sister.

There is a crescent awakening of tribal brotherhood in this Pawnee song:

Look as they rise, rise
Over the line where the sky meets the earth;
Pleiades!
They, as they rise, come to guide us,
Leading us safely, keeping us one.
Pleiades,
Teach us to be, like you, united.

But the usual note is war, and not peace. Primitive man, while an amateur at group killing, compared to his civilized descendant, still tried to get in his daily dozen ambushes or skirmishes; and, where there is a will, there are a variety of ways. Here is a Navaho war-charm:

Now, Slayer of the Alien Gods, I am among men.
Now I am among the alien gods with weapons of magic,
Rubbed with the summits of the mountains.

Apparently even the gods of the enemy tribes required an ample ambulance corps, at the end of a battle. Another Navaho war-song proceeds:

Ha, I am the flint youth!

His moccasins, leggings, tunic, bonnet, were all of black flint; even—

The heart living within me
Is of clearest, purest flint. . . .
Now the four zigzag lightnings
Flash from me. . . .
They hurl the enemy into the ground—
Ancient folk, with evil charms,
Dashed to earth, one upon another.

This song said that the youthful warrior was the ancient equivalent of poison gas and T. N. T.; for the flinted arrow, the flint-tipped spear, was early warlike science's latest contribution to warfare. A strident Micmac warrior's song ends with the great line,

I make death, singing!

The young men's songs includes this depilatory memorandum:

Many scalps
We shall bring on our return.

The Ojibwa were positively vicious in their battle-lust:

Hear my scream, birds of war!
I prepare a feast for you to feed on;
I see you cross the enemy's lines;
I shall go like you.
I want the swiftness of your wings,
I want the ripping vengeance of your claws. . . .
Mountains tremble at my yell!
I strike for life.

The Chippewa songs are as definite, including the brilliant arrow song, a charm that masks in its brief beauty a gory wish:

Scarlet
is its head.

That is the poem complete. If the arrow achieved this, this phase of the copper heaven descended to earth.

Even the Chippewa women went into battle, as their war song attests. The enemy Sioux women are forced to go wailing, while they gather up their desperately wounded men; and this scalp song shows a savage game:

I wonder
if she is humiliated,

the Sioux woman,
that I cut off her head.

The Cherokees have their own red cantraps:

Listen! Now I have come to step over your soul. . . .
Your spittle I have put to rest under the earth.
I have come to cover you over with the black rock, . . .
never to reappear. . . .
Now your soul has faded away,
It has become blue.
When darkness comes, your spirit shall grow less and
dwindle away, never to reappear.

As the body dies, the soul fades into nothingness. . . . So the ancient Indians sang; so some modern scientists say.

The Zuni, the Pima, lifted their war gloats:

There stands the doomed habitation.
Its frightened chief runs about the pueblo. . . .
Poor distracted enemy; take him!

and again,

The Apache slave was killed,
And his hide tanned for leather.

Only one faint counter-chorus, this from the Omaha:

The clear sky,
The green fruitful earth, are good;
But peace among men is better.

Let the lily-livered snivel of peace, the warlike majority roared; for us, war, and the red death!

Even this comes through the white heart, and the white tongue, and is slightly suspect.

Invocations to war, to slaughter of men and women, to tanning

the hides of the enemy for leather . . . to slaughter of souls as well as bodies; to slaughter of alien gods as well . . . for vengeance, for blood: with a faint whimper of family love, tribal unity, distant peace. So runs the Indian song.

iv.

So far with the food forces and the love forces. When we come to the lowest of the higher forces, that part of man's seeking nature that sees and desires beauty, there is less to be found. Yet beauty—the harmony of one's surroundings that comforts all the senses, and stretches the soul upward toward the descending stars—was on every hand, and at times crept out to the tongue's tip, and leapt forth. The Navaho daylight song thrills to it:

> The curtain of daybreak is hanging. . . .
> Before him, in beauty, it is hanging;
> Behind him, in beauty, it is hanging.

It is not the use of the word *beauty* that classifies this; it is the recognition of the tactilely inutile quality of beauty in the sunrise that badges it. The Pawnee saw the sunup similarly:

> O, the deer! O, the deer, the deer,
> Comes from her thicket of night!
> Day is here! Day has come among us—
> All living things wake up to see the brightness!

The Ojibwa lauded the fire-flies:

> Flitting white-fire insects!
> Wandering small-fire beasts!
> Wave little stars about my head!
> Weave little stars into my sleep!
> Come, . . . light me with your white-flame magic,
> Your little star-torch.

There is a sense of beauty here, as there is in this Navaho incantation:

> The magpie! The magpie!
> In the white under his wings are the footsteps of morning.
> It dawns! It dawns!

Comes the dawn thus; and the same tribe has its long *Songs of Dawn Boy:*

> Beauty before me—I wander with it.
> Beauty behind me—I wander with it.
> Beauty below me—I wander with it.
> Beauty above me—I wander with it.
> Beauty all around me—I wander with it.
> On the beautiful trail I stand—I wander with it.

There is also a constant overtone of appreciation of the beauties of nature, as in some of the corn and rain incantations, and in some of the more whispering love-pleas. But the actual expression and recognition of this emotion is slight, and limited to a few sections.

v.

The emotional and moral forces, cresting in expressions of religion concerning god and personal immortality, (faintly including the wish for immortality of the poet's song), are not ample in extent. The Navaho, who were very vocal, or whose songs are more amply preserved than some tribes', sang:

> In a holy place I walk with a god. . . .
> On a chief of mountains I walk with a god,
> In old age wandering I walk with a god,
> On a trail of beauty I walk with a god.

The repetitive technique of a simpler Negro spiritual, or any

dawn folksong. *The Song of the Mateless Woman* shows religion growing out of a love-gap:

Return to me, O my power!
It is I that call,
I, the medicine woman,
Childless, unmated—

No, I shall mate with the gods,
And the tribesmen shall be my children! . . .

This is my song that I make,
The song of the mateless woman!
No one holds my hand
But the Friend-of-the-Soul-of-Man.

We shall beget great deeds between us!

This is slightly suspect as an authentic Amerindian song. Even more apparently stained by the Christian attitude is this fragment, attributed to the Cheyenne:

I bring the whirlwind,
That you may know one another.
We shall live again!

The Omaha had in their birth ritual:

O, you Sun, Moon, Stars, all you that move in the heavens,
Hear me!
Into your midst has come a new life.
Consent, I beg!
Smooth its path, that it may reach the brow of the first hill!

The songs of the ghost-dance religion are recent, emanating from the inner fire of a mild seer valleyed deep within the hidden Southwest. They bear every feature of having come from an absorption of Christian pabulum. Let some say that the messiah concept is far older, among the Indians, than the

coming of Christianity to them; any race, troubled beyond immediate reaction, dreams its redeemer. Yet the Christian stain discolors this whole Kiowa song:

> The Father will descend,
> Everybody will rise. . . .
> The spirit army is approaching. . . .
> Let us all pray. . . .
> Because I am poor
> I pray for every living creature.

The original Indian was not poor, and he knew this: he owned —as one of his tribe—his valley or hill dwelling, his fields to till, his woodlands to range after four-footed or two-footed prey, even the sky that wiped its eyes so soon after the cooling Niagara of tears.

Closer to Indian reality are the songs from the far North, for the great feast to the dead:

> Dead ones, come here: *A-la'-ai-ya'*. . . .
> Sealskins for a tent you will get, *A-la'-ai-ya'*. . . .
> Reindeer skins for a bed you will get, *A-la'-ai-ya'*.

A Chippewa sang:

> My music
> reaches
> to the sky.

A natural longing. . . .

All that we have here, that we can be sure of, is a definite belief in gods, of nature, of battle; a faint belief in personal immortality; a longing of the poet that his songs may pierce the rigid ears of heaven.

vi.

The last of the non-essential social forces is the intellectual, the striving for knowledge: whose lowest budding is a curiosity

about the facts of the universe, and their interrelation. A Yokut song-maker is said to have sung,

All my life
I have been seeking, seeking!

Ambiguous, as far as its intellectual content is concerned. A Winnebago holy song contains,

I went into solitude,
And wisdom was revealed to me. . . .
Let the whole world hear me,
I am wise! . . .
All was revealed to me;
From the beginning
I know everything. Hear me!

But beyond this the song says nothing. An ambitious desire for all-knowledge; but intellectual curiosity was of slight importance to the Amerindian.

vii.

Deeper than all these desires lies an earlier one: what Freud calls ineptly the repetition compulsion; what might be better described as the return compulsion—the insistence of the organism that it return, in its own way, at its own time, to its original state, before the environment or its inner irk disturbed its balming repose. As expressions of this, we have all forms of nostalgia, home-sickness, atavism: a desire to return to what was.

Thus a return to nature, out of civilization's bewilderingness; a return to childhood; a return to that primal movelessness called death.

We have already had the Haida plea for a return to the imagined ancient bliss, when slaves did not own fashionable abalone-shells. From Southern California comes the *Eagle's Song:*

I went west,
On the world-ringing water;

Death's trail was before me.
People, O people,
It is needful that we must die!

A Tewa bard sings:

Now I remember my home over there!
And when I see that faroff mountain,
I weep. What can I do?

The Iroquois ritual of fire and darkness contains,

Great spirit who puts us to sleep in darkness,
We thank you for the silences of darkness.

So the Chippewa recoils from the din of the village, to the silence of the earlier woodlands: phrasing this recoil as a complaint.

Whenever I pause,
the noise
of the village!

The Tlingit furnishes:

Already I am going,
I am going to die.
I have dreamed of my son.

And still another:

I always think, deep within myself,
that there is no place
where people do not die.

A mere reflection, you may object. But thought is the butler of emotion; even fear is the obverse of desire. Death . . . the end of every man's desire. . . .

And this was the copper-faces' heaven.

Their earth lacked many blessings and ills that ours holds; so their heaven is free from these.

These were no successive schools of poetry. What was said once was good enough.

From this dream picture, it is easy to see what the actual living of the Amerindian largely consisted of. It differed only slightly from the sought Elysium. It was not a life, nor a desired heaven, of progress. Things were; they stood still; they were fairly perfect as they were; improvement was not even dreamed of, as a mass or individual dream—beyond a little more of the blessings, a little less of the irks. Their enemies were the half-friendly environment, uttering storm or drouth or cold; man, at their own stage; and their own ignorance. Only the first two of these were recognized. If they dreamed any great distance beyond what their life had, this dream is lost.

Some of these songs antedate 1609, 1492. They do not blur the real picture too much, whatever their date. Life, religion, tribal teachings, flowed along with nature's unplanned laws. There was no preachment of celibacy, of unnatural chastity, even of intermingling with the whites; no word of opportunity's moment to be seized. Happiness was the first goal, and death the last. For all its red stir, it was a frozen life, a static heaven. There was no itch for wealth, for individual success, for tribal imperialism. It was largely a being, rather than a becoming.

Has any of this song stirred us as poetry?

At times, perhaps, yes: often in the suspect portions, where the white heart seems to be speaking.

Poetry is words arranged according to some definite pattern, which can move us to the high and noble emotions, or their opposites. This is a subjective definition; there is no other that is accurate.

If these songs spoke truly the desires of the singers, these were poems to them.

If their tribes echoed these desires, this was poetry to the tribesmen.

If we thrill to the same desires, this is poetry to us.

Greatness in poetry consists in the social recognition of the group's desires in the songs of the poet.

The first American song. . . . But, after all, it reached the living American mind and soul lately—only yesterday. It was dull when we heard it first—a dull strange jargoning. It faints again, almost below hearing. It faints. . . . We turn to a louder, more recognizable song.



THE SINGING EDEN

"Cheerfully at sea
Success you still entice."

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II

THE SINGING EDEN

AMERICAN song can not be understood without a sense of the mother-song which preceded it,—the English mother-song. The early Anglo-Saxon poetry, the Norman song of Chaucer, were bedded in the hearts that made our America: but a nearer song expressed these hearts more fully. The two centuries between Jamestown and 1800 saw American ideals phrased most clearly by the overseas singers. Let us turn then to England. . . .

Elizabeth three years in her virgin tomb. . . .

The son of Mary Queen of Scots was lording it over England, flouting and pricking the Puritan divines, coddling the papish Catholics and harrying them by turn, till a man had no notion where the royal countenance might warm, and where scorch.

Sidney of the courtly song was dead. Lyly, Greene, Peele, resonant Chris Marlowe, tranced Spenser, melodious de Vere, all dead. But Master Campion, the lutanist, still lifted his strains into the attendant ears of the morning stars; Ben Jonson had just ennobled the boards with the fox's baring of the world's heart:

> Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues,
> Thou canst do nought, and yet mak'st men do all things;
> The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,
> Is made worth heaven. Thou art virtue, fame,
> Honour, and all things else. Who can get thee,
> He shall be noble valiant, honest, wise —

and the pander's tender of his sweet wife to senile lust;

> Should I offer this
> To some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood
> That had read Aretine, conn'd all his prints,

Knew every quirk within lust's labyrinth,
And were profess'd critic in lechery;
And I would look upon him, and applaud him,
This were a sin; but here, 'tis contrary,
A pious work, mere charity for physic.

When the wife is reluctant, the husband roars:

Be damn'd!
Heart, I will drag thee hence, home, by the hair;
Cry thee a strumpet through the streets; rip up
Thy mouth into thine ears; and slit thy nose
Like a raw rochet,

as a chef splits a fish. Playing above this is the sweet solo of the senile seducer to his intended victim,

Come, my Celia, let us prove,
While we can, the sports of love.
Time will not be ours for ever. . . .
Spend not then his gifts in vain. . . .
'Tis no sin love's fruits to steal.

He offers her what is to him a mad overprice for reluctant chastity:

Conscience? 'Tis a beggar's virtue. . . .
Thy baths shall be the juice of July flowers,
Spirit of roses, and of violets,
The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath,
Gather'd in bags, and mixt with Cretan wines.
Our drink shall be prepared gold and amber.

So on, to the absurd punishment of the old voluptuary. This is Venice. . . . This is England. . . . This is the world of man on earth, his certitude of heaven.

England heard this most. A few listened, a bit scornfully, to

a strutting mountebank, an unfamilied ranter, who placed a doting English king on the boards, with his—

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks. . . .
And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world,
Crack nature's moulds, all germans spill at once
That make ingrateful man!

What matter if this same vender of grains of Paradise for the groundlings show a harried Scottish king, seeking tuppenny counsel of old hags:

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot,

with the king's weak whine over his yielding before life's roaring joyfulness:

Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

In this same hour, His Majesty's London Company fitted forth and sent out a shipped company of five score colonists, to fare across the western seaway to the salvage land named Virginia, in honor of the queen dead.

A later English poet called poetry emotion recollected in tranquillity. There is an ember-fire of truth in this near-wisdom.

He was picturing his own song chiefly; yet there is an overstayed fraction of truth here.

This is untrue of poetry wrung from the heart in its Sahara of unfulfilled desires, whether for one pair of soft unattainable arms, or for food to bring more than a listless creeping into the starved body. Poetry can come from the core of such an emotion: it is not out of tranquillity, but out of lack, that the poet sings:

> Singing is sweet; but be sure of this,
> Lips only sing when they cannot kiss.

And they do not wait for nonogenarian tranquillity, before lifting their lack.

But if the dyke break, if the storm-racked ship spring a leak, if the assault pounds shatteringly into the city, it is no time to utter the desire for quick balm in golden songs: it is time to stop the leak, to man the pumps, to repel the invaders.

Those who set sail from a singing land to the demi-virginal continent left song behind them, except for its echoes in their hearts. They set their souls to the more impending tasks of repelling the waves and felling the trees, of repelling the savages and wresting out of the sparsely-fleshed skin of earth that humblest of all gifts to man, life.

They prospered, as tardily fruitful fields, slowly rising rude houses, and hasty Indian graves, fully attested. They were not weaned from England yet; the umbilical cord of their souls trembled for two centuries and more to the uttered word of the homing souls across the waters. Let us turn to this long-heard speech. . . .

i.

It was a man's song, no doubt of that, this English poetry between 1609 and 1800. Consider only the Sirius names: Shakespeare, Campion, Jonson, Ford, Herrick, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Blake, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge. . . . The song was a giant's robe upon giants; it was only later that dwarfish thieves flung their puny bicker at the unimpressed sky.

It was man's song, and not woman's song. The sphinx unlocked her lips slowly. She has uttered her will today; but for this yesterhour she held her lips, at least, virginal.

Man's word had its overtone of jollity. Thus Autolycus, in *The Winter's Tale:*

> Jog on, jog on the footpath way,
> And merrily hent the stile-a;
> A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad lives in a mile-a.

Thus Merrythought, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle,* by Beaumont and Fletcher, lifted a song typical of still merry England:

> 'Tis mirth that fills the veins with blood,
> More than wine, or sleep, or food.
> Let each man keep his heart at ease;
> No man dies of that disease. . . .
> But contented lives for aye;
> The more he laughs, the more he may.

Laugh and grow ninety. . . . There is Ralph, in the same play, chanting rural joys:

> Rejoice, O English hearts, rejoice! rejoice, O lovers dear!
> Rejoice, O city, town, and country! rejoice, eke every shire!
> For now the fragrant flowers do spring and sprout in seemly sort,
> The little birds do sit and sing, the lambs do make fine sport. . . .
> The lords and ladies now abroad, for their disport and play,
> Do kiss sometimes upon the grass, and sometimes in the hay; . . .
> Now little fish on tender stone begin to cast their bellies,
> And sluggish snails, that erst were mewed, do creep out of their shellies;
> Up, then, I say, both young and old, both man and maid a-maying,
> With drums, and guns that bounce aloud, and merry tabor playing!
> Which to prolong, God save our king, and send his country peace,

And root out treason from the land! and so, my friends, I cease.

Ringing against this was a song well remembered: Sir Walter Raleigh's indictment of Elizabeth's recent hour:

Say to the Court, it glows
 And shines like rotten wood;
Say to the Church, it shows
 What's good, and doth no good:
If Church and Court reply,
Then give them both the lie. . . .

Tell Fortune of her blindness;
 Tell Nature of decay;
Tell Friendship of unkindness;
 Tell Justice of delay;
And if they will reply,
Then give them all the lie.

Michael Drayton, addressing the colonists departing for Virginia, trumpets resonantly:

You brave heroic minds,
Worthy your country's name,
 That honour still pursue;
 Go and subdue,
Whilst loitering hinds
Lurk here at home in shame. . . .

Cheerfully at sea
Success you still entice
 To get the pearl and gold,
 And ours to hold
Virginia,
Earth's only Paradise;

Where Nature hath in store
Fowl, venison, and fish,

And the fruitful'st soil,
Without your toil,
Three harvests more,
All greater than your wish. . . .

In Virginia, starvation, disease, vagabondage would have ended the colony, but for the starred arrival of Lord de la Warre's filled ships. The colony soil seemed at first, to the settlers, as Paradisal as hell's backyard. But the song phrased the motherland's desires, its misplaced heaven.

Here's Francis Quarles, singing the life nearer at home like a predated Robinson:

Here's nothing worth a smile.

Here's the king, in second *Henry IV*, surveying the whole scene of life:

O God! that one might read the book of fate,
And see the revolution of the times
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
Into the sea! and, other times, to see
The beachy girdle of the ocean
Too wide for Neptune's hips; how chances mock,
And changes fill the cup of alteration
With divers liquors! O, if this were seen,
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book, and sit him down to die.

Let the riotous Prince and the ale-barrel Falstaff plot and execute their picayune robberies; a king holds otherwise. He wants to emulate the unheard Indian poet, and be worm's food. The people? They are the rabblement, with chapped hands, sweaty nightcaps, and stinking breath. Men—great men, that is, and their women, press onward for preferment, at the expense of

their fellows. To earn the name and the revenues of a crown, a woman can cry—

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direct cruelty! . . . Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, "Hold, hold!"

—which, in the end, turns out to be merely—

> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other.

Maddened Lear cries:

> Through tatter'd clothes great vices do appear;
> Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
> Arm it in rags, a pygmy's straw doth pierce it.

In burning sonnet words the poet surveys the all:

> Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry,—
> As, to behold desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
> And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
> And gilded honor shamefully misplac'd,
> And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
> And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
> And strength by limping sway disabled,
> And art made tongue-tied with authority,
> And folly doctor-like controlling skill,
> And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
> And captive good attending captain ill.

I would end all, the poet says, except for the thought of my loved one.

Poetry, you may say, and dismiss it all. This is as packed full of smashing truths as an auditor's statement of a bank's deposits and securities. It reads like an indictment of an opposition party in politics; but the poet meant every word of it, primarily as a picture of his own prostrate role beneath Juggernaut civilization, and secondarily as a picture of the lot of all but the worthless clowns that rode in the swaying howdah.

There is still no recognition of democracy, for all of this earned groan. Degree, or caste, is lifted skyhigh by Ulysses, in *Troilus and Cressida:*

> How could communities,
> Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
> The primogenity and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?
> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And, hark, what discord follows! each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy; the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
> And make a sop of all this solid globe;
> Strength should be lord of imbecility,
> And the rude son should strike his father dead;
> Force should be right. . . .
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey,
> And last eat up himself.

It never occurred to the poet that caste or degree—the rule of the descendants of earlier pre-gun gunmen—made force right. We have seen the people elevated, and caste partially overthrown, in France, America, England, Italy, Russia: there are alarmist reports from the mossbacks, but there is still some laughter in

each; and only prohibition seems strong enough to make a sop of any of the globe.

Read this, not as poetry, but as a stock report, the latest sports or fashion note, a cooking recipe. It means precisely as much; do not let the vestibuled expression close your ears to the truth behind the high phrasing.

Democracy has come, and man is still far from sunset. Partial democracy, that is. . . .

The indictment returns in *Timon of Athens*, that agony of the poet stripped by money-lenders, harvesting in the most dreadful curse man has ever pronounced on men. Picture this in your own land, your own city, your own home:

> Matrons, turn incontinent;
> Obedience fail in children! slaves and fools,
> Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench,
> And minister in their steads! to general filths
> Convert o' the instant, green virginity,
> Do't in your parents' eyes! . . . bound servants, steal! . . .
> Maid, to thy master's bed;
> Thy mistress is o' the brothel! Son of sixteen,
> Pluck the lin'd crutch from thy old limping sire,
> With it beat out his brains! . . . Plagues incident to men,
> Your potent and infectious fevers heap
> On Athens, ripe for stroke! . . . Lust and liberty
> Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
> That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive,
> And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
> Sow all the Athenian bosoms, and their crop
> Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath;
> That their society, as their friendship, may
> Be merely poison!

This is his mild preamble. It reads more and more like a picture of the Younger Generation—of any age. England and the colony land took this to their bosoms in time; this became their desire too.

It is in the mouth of Gonzalo, an honest old counsellor, in the *Tempest*, that the poet's heaven on earth is blueprinted most amply:

> I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,
> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
> No occupation; all men idle, all;
> And women too, but innocent and pure;
> No sovereignty. . . .
> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavor; treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance.
> To feed my innocent people.

About as practical as a diet exclusively of mosquitoes' tongues. The poet grows old: too old for knee-crooking and flattery to noble and royal having; old enough to see heaven as an opulent anarchy that untended nature never gives, but on the banks of the pestilential Congo and Amazon. To hell with civilization! Let's live like hippopotamuses. . . .

The mature judgment, uttered by Prospero, is:

> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yes, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

All this was written more than three hundred years ago, in speech as straightforward as a business transaction. How many generations since of heedless English and American poetlings have ye'd and thou'd their bleating baa's upon the stage of poetry, forgetting the master's sword talk!

Shakespeare died; Jonson lived on a little while. His Sir Epicure Mammon rioted in dreams of riches:

> My flatterers
> Shall be the pure and gravest of divines.—
> And they shall fan me with ten estrich tails
> A-piece, made in a plume to gather wind. . . .
> My meat shall come in, in Indian shells,
> Dishes of agate, set in gold, and studded
> With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.

Swine do not eat pearls; nor do they matter to wise people. This sufficed man's hunger for the brief hectic hour it was uttered.

Then came a bleaker time, England divided against itself, with a great eyeless singer who could not fail but lament his need for eyes: a need shared still by all. Thomas Carew lamented that love's beauties were clerks to time:

> As old Time makes these decay,
> So his flames must waste away.

Richard Lovelace sang:

> Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage;
> Minds innocent and quiet take
> That for an hermitage.
> If I have freedom in my love,
> And in my soul am free,
> Angels alone, that soar above,
> Enjoy such liberty.

Well, he was in the Gatehouse at Westminster, next door to the chain-gang. He had to make the most of it. Lord Bacon had written, long before, of the life of man:

> Curst from his cradle, and brought up to years
> With cares and fears; . . .
> Courts are but only superficial schools
> To dandle fools:
> The rural parts are turn'd into a den
> Of savage men:
> And where's a city from foul vice so free
> But may be termed the worst of all the three?

Sir Henry Wotton was as hopeful as might be:

> How happy is he born and taught,
> That serveth not another's will; . . .
> Lord of himself, though not of lands;
> And having nothing, yet hath all.

Sir Henry had little, and was once jailed for debt. A long cry, this, from Ulysses' plea for degree and caste!

Meanwhile, the folk ballads were heaving Robin Hood crudely upward, as a Saxon folk-hero against Norman upperclass insolence, as a poor man's Jack to lay low the giants of wealth and position:

> Then Little John took the Bishop's cloak,
> And spread it upon the ground;
> And out of the Bishop's portmantua
> He told three hundred pounds.

Served the pious old skinflint right!

Here's the mason, Lamkin, who builds Lord Wearie's castle, and is refused payment for it. A little direct action. . . . Lamkin murders the lord's baby, and his wife; the lady's nurse, Lamkin's accomplice, saying:

What better is the heart's blood
O' the rich than o' the poor?

Noble hearers must not be antagonized too far; so Lamkin and the nurse die in the end, after the populace have had a good hearty swig of noble blood.

The ballads headline yokel wit. *Saddle to Rags* has its silly old rural hero get the better of a gentleman-thief, by a trick making away with the highwayman's "portmantle" and its thousand pounds. *The Yorkshire Horse-Dealer* tells of an old Yorkshire tike, Tommy Tavers, who bests a neighbor in a swap of horses, sight unseen. Both horses were corpses; but Tommy's had already been flayed:

So Tommy got t' better of t' bargain, a vast,
And came off with a Yorkshireman's triumph at last;
For though 'twixt dead horses there's not much to choose,
Yet Tommy was richer by the hide and four shoes.

In these ballads the commoner marries the upperclassman—sure sign of an underclass heaven:

"He needs no more to trudge afoot,
He'll travel coach and pair;
My wealth with him—or poverty
With him, content I'll share."
Now fill the horn with barleycorn,
And flowing fill the can,
Here let us toast the Mayor's daughter
And the roving journeyman.

Not so much optimism upstairs. Here's Henry Vaughan, picturing in *The World:*

The darksome Statesman hung with weights and woe. . . .
Churches' altars feed him; perjuries
Were gnats and flies;

It rain'd about him blood and tears; but he
Drank them as free.

The miser, the epicure, fare quite as disagreeably. Here's Alexander Pope, the sickly little wasp of Twickenham, growing out of an artificial humility—

Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground. . . .

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I dee,

into a torturer of Colley Cibber and the other belaurelled nonentities of the hour, flayed in *The Dunciad:*

Next o'er his books his eyes began to roll,
In pleasing memory of all he stole,

ending with the magnificent nihilistic evocation:

She comes! she comes! the sable throne behold
Of night primeval and of chaos old! . . .
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after art goes out, and all is night.
See skulking truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of causuistry heap'd o'er her head! . . .
Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,
And unawares morality expires.
Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine,
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine.
Lo! thy dread empire, chaos! is restored:
Light dies before thy uncreating word;

Thy hand, great anarch! lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all.

Oliver Goldsmith was about as cheerful as a hyena. In *The Traveller* he airs a thoughtful man's grouch:

That independence Britons prize too high
Keeps man from man, and breaks the social tie;
The self-dependent lordling stands alone. . . .
And talent sinks, and merit weeps unknown. . . .
Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw,
Law grinds the poor, and rich men rule the law;
The wealth of climes, where savage nations roam,
Pillag'd from slaves to purchase slaves at home. . . .
Have we not seen, round Britain's peopled shore,
Her useful sons exchanged for useless ore?

The Deserted Village was hugged more wildly to the troubled English heart:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay; . . .
But times are altered; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land and dispossess the swain;
Along the lawn, where scatter'd hamlets rose,
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose;
And every want to opulence allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.

Here is George Crabbe, abandoning the sinking ship of prettification of country life, for the rugged raft of a harsh realism. Newspapers:

Our weekly journals o'er the land abound,
And spread their plagues and influenzas round;

the actual farmers—

While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts;

the houses of the poor—

Where flags the noon-tide air, and, as we pass,
We fear to breathe the putrefying mass;

the parish doctor—

Paid for the parish for attendance here,
He wears contempt upon his sapient sneer;

the election—

Yes, our election's past, and we've been free,
Somewhat as madmen without keepers be;

the failure—

There he again displays, increasing yet
Corroding sorrow and consuming debt.

A low flight of poetry; but no gay picture. Here's half-mad William Blake, singing the same thing sky-soaringly:

O rose, thou art sick;
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

There is his acid *London:*

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet—
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear. . . .

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plague the marriage-hearse.

William Wordsworth saw life as sour:

And much it grieved my heart to think
What Man has made of Man.

Robert Burns could reflect with dignity—

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!

and damn the man "who would set the Mob above the Throne." But he remembered,

But while we sing "God save the King,"
We'll ne'er forget The People!

and uttered one of the battle-songs of democracy:

What though on homely fare we dine,
Wear hodden grey, an' a' that?
Give fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their tinsel shows, an' a' that,

The honest man, tho' e'er so poor,
Is king o' men for a' that!

We turn to the softer song, of what man had made of woman, and love. . . .

ii.

Love was as multi-throated as a May forest dense with song. These mad ranting lovers—they're all worth listening to; but the line must be drawn somewhere. They swagger gallantly forth—

Here is Thomas Lodge, a lord mayor's son, a world-wanderer, studying medicine almost at the age of fifty, loose liver, Catholic convert:

Turn I my looks unto the skies,
Love with his arrows wounds mine eyes;
If so I gaze upon the ground,
Love then in every flower is found; . . .
If so I mourn, he weeps with me,
And where I am, there will he be!

Here is Chris Marlowe, a shoemaker's son, professed atheist, stabbed to his death before thirty by a bawdy servingman, in a love-tilt over a tavern wench, singing with an angel's tongue:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield;

shaming the morning stars in *Doctor Faustus:*

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. . . .
O, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars. . . .
And none but thou shalt be my paramour!

and toying with an ancient and sterile love-play in *Dido*, when Jupiter and Ganymede dialog:

Ganymede. Grace my immortal beauty with this boon,
And I will spend my time in thy bright arms. . . .
Jupiter. And shalt have, Ganymede, if thou wilt be my love.
Venus. Ay, this it is: you can sit toying there,
And playing with that female wanton boy.

Of course, anything that Jupiter did was accepted as respectable.

Here is Thomas Campion, soldier, doctor, with love songs, "the superfluous blossoms of his deeper studies," soaring above the galaxy:

These ladies must have pillows,
And beds by strangers wrought;
Give me a bower of willows,
Of moss and leaves unbought,
And fresh Amaryllis
With milk and honey fed,
Who, when we court and kiss,
She cries, forsooth, let go.
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say no.

Oh, he was apt in love-talk:

Yet love me not, nor seek thou to allure
My thoughts with beauty, were it more divine;
Thy smiles and kisses I cannot endure,
I'll not be wrapt up in those arms of thine.
Now show it, if thou be a woman right,—
Embrace, and kiss, and love me, in despite.

Or this undying music:

Shall I come, sweet love, to thee
When the evening beams are set?

Shall I not excluded be?
Will you find no feigned let?
Let me not, for pity, more
Tell the long hours at your door.

Here is Will Shakespeare, singing with stripped frankness in his poem of bold-faced Venus's wooing of reluctant Adonis,

Who sees his true-loved in her naked bed,
Teaching the sheets a whiter hue than white,
But, when his glutton eye so full hath fed,
His other agents aim at like delight?

Here's the young goriness of *Titus Andronicus*, with the plot against Lavinia:

She is a woman, therefore may be wooed;
She is a woman, therefore may be won. . . .
What, man! more water glideth by the mill
Than wots the miller of, and easy it is
Of a cut loaf to steal a shive.

The lascive mother will not rob her "sweet sons of their fee." Satisfaction of the love-lust by violence was in the English heart; the theme was popular. Here is Juliet singing, in glorious abandon:

Come night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night,
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

No maidenly shyness here. Here's a familiar strain, from *Twelfth Night:*

> In delay there lies no plenty;
> Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
> Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Here is *Othello* moving from the exquisite beauty of the Moor's welcome to his bride on Cyprus, to the hour when the barb of jealousy is hooked within his soul:

> I had been happy, if the general camp,
> Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
> So I had nothing known. O, now, for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
> Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars
> That make ambition virtue!

with the dreadful scene where he feigns that Desdemona's maid is the procuress, to the shaking beauty of the death scene. Here is Cressida, trull of soul, saying:

> Women are angels, wooing;
> Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing;

with Pandarus' utter ribaldries, and talk enough of male varlets and cliffs. Here are the love sonnets, with their high talk of love triumphing over all eclipses of disgrace, and his excuses for his love's spottedness of conduct:

> Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
> Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd;
> And when a woman wooes, what woman's son
> Will sourly leave her till she have prevail'd?

Look now upon this sonnet picture:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove. . . .
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom;

—and on this, with its harsher truth in describing the love encounter:

Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe,
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

There is a youth in the sequence, the "master-mistress" of the poet's passion—an ambiguous strand, but ever-present.

Here is Samuel Daniel, a music-master's son, grown to be master of the queen's revels, indicting his "injurious Delia" for her denials:

Let Venus have her graces, her resign'd,
And thy sweet voice give back unto the spheres;
But yet restore thy fierce and cruel mind
To Hyrcan tigers and to ruthless bears.
Yield to the marble thy hard heart again:
So shalt thou cease to plague, and I to plain.

Here is Joshua Sylvester, son of a Kentish clothier, uttering no fustian, but real song:

Thou art not fair, for all thy red and white,
For all those rosy temperatures in thee;
Thou art not sweet, though made of mere delight,
Nor fair, nor sweet, unless thou pity me. . . .
I wilt not soothe thy follies; thou shalt prove
That beauty is no beauty without love.

They keep crowding in, an endless flock of love poets and poetlings as numerous as the troubadours from Provence, and far more realistic in their woman-chasing. Henry Constable, a knight's son who was exiled most of his life, spoke love's suspense poignantly:

To live in hell, and heaven to behold,
To welcome life and die a living death,
To sweat with heat, and yet be freezing cold,
To grasp at stars, and lie the earth beneath;

Michael Drayton, the overwordy court poet who sat in at the drinking bout with Ben Jonson that led to Shakespeare's death, sings cleanly:

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part,—
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.

Suspicious agreeableness! Concluding—

Now at the last gasp of love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, passion speechless lies,
When faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And innocence is closing up his eyes,

—Now, if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!

Turn to *The Maid's Tragedy*, to see what strong fare Beaumont and Fletcher feed us, with the great scene in which the king's mistress reveals to her husband, on the wedding night, that she has wed him only to cloak the royal affair. *The Faithful Sheperdess* has the Sullen Shepherd boasting a philosophy that Herrick repeats soon:

All to me in sight
Are equal; be they fair, or black, or brown,
Virgin, or careless wanton, I can crown
My appetite with any. . . .
Offer her all I have to gain the jewel
Maidens so highly prize; then loathe, and fly;
This do I hold a blessed destiny.

Cloe, in the same play, is frank enough:

For from one cause of fear I am most free,
It is impossible to ravish me,
I am so willing.

Crowding on the heels of the great Elizabethans come the lesser courtier poets, with love generally near the level of the play between Cloe and the Sullen Shepherd. Sir John Suckling, inventor of cribbage, the premier card-player and bowler in first Charles's court, luted lightly:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale? . . .

Quit, quit, for shame; this will not move:
This cannot take her.

If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her:
The devil take her!

He is as constant as a humming-bird:

Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

Time shall moult away his wings,
Ere he shall discover
In the whole wide world again
Such a constant lover!

Here is Thomas Carew, who owed his advancement at court to tact—vast tact. He was holding the candle to light first Charles into the queen's apartment, when he looked up and saw Lord St. Albans embracing the queen. Tactful Thomas stumbled at once, extinguishing the candle and the possible scandal; after that, the queen saw to it that he rose, at discreet intervals. Carew sang sweetly:

Ask me no more whither doth haste
The nightingale when May is past,
For in your sweet dividing throat
She winters and keeps warm her note. . . .
Ask me no more if east or west
The phoenix builds her spicy nest,
For unto you at last she flies,
And in your fragment bosom dies.

Sir Charles Sedley wooes, with no depth of passion:

'Tis cruel to prolong the pain;
And to defer a joy,

Believe me, gentle Celemene,
Offends the winged boy.

A hundred thousand oaths your fears
Perhaps would not remove;
And if I gazed a thousand years
I could not deeper love.

They were all of this type now.

Robert Herrick, the rural tuppenny parson, who traced back to Eric the Lucky and other roistering Norse adventurers, sang this pagan advice to all virgins:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

His platform was frank:

I do not love to wed,
Though I do like to woo;
And for a maidenhead
I'll beg, and buy it too.

A jolly cousin of the Sullen Shepherd:

What I fancy, I approve:
No dislike there is in love.
Be my mistress short or tall,
And distorted therewithal;
Be she likewise one of those
That an acre hath of nose; . . .
Be her lips ill hung, or set,
And her grinders black as jet;
Has she thin hair, hath she none,
She's to me a paragon.

Julia was his chief sparring-partner on the lists of love; he described her as not too different from the specifications above. He sang in tiny odes her petticoat, her bed, her legs, her unlacing herself, her silks, her bathing—with the poor parson plunging in the river in cupiditous excitement—her waking, her treasures that she kept under her attire; but all as gallantry, not affection. He shakes the cocktail of his song out of three ingredients: his god, his drink, and his girls; lifting religious symbolism into a pagan rhapsody, as in this song to Dianeme:

> Show me thy feet; show me thy legs, thy thighs;
> Show me those fleshly principalities; . . .
> Show me thy waist; then let me there, withal,
> By the ascension of thy lawn, see all.

Love is all play; any woman will do—and for one thing only. Even marriage is frowned at.

Edmund Waller, cousin to the annoyingly upright Hampden, briefly insane over love, addressed a girdle with mad passion:

> A narrow compass! and yet there
> Dwelt all that's good, and all that's fair;
> Give me but what this ribband bound,
> Take all the rest the Sun goes round.

When the tropical regions are valued above the brains, with the rest of the universe thrown it, we have reached a bloated sense of values!

George Wither, who earned jail by some of his verses, surely earned pardon by this song:

> Shall I, wasting in despair,
> Die because a woman's fair?
> Or my cheeks make pale with care
> 'Cause another's rosy are?
> Be she fairer than the day
> Or the flowery meads in May—

If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be?

Henry Carey, left-handed son of a marquis, hymned a humbler love:

When she is by, I leave my work,
I love her so sincerely;
My master comes like any Turk,
And bangs me most severely—
But let him bang his bellyful,
I'll bear it all for Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.

The folk ballads, the Tin Pan Alley songs of the hour, reeked with seduction, with death as the usual terminus of the lusty romance. The mother quiets her illegitimate child—

She's ta'en out her little penknife,
And twinned the sweet babe o' its life.

The smith, by the aid of primitive powwow magic, makes the fine lady his mistress:

Then she became a silken plaid,
And stretch'd upon a bed;
And he became a green covering,
And gain'd her maidenhead.

The girl "who aims to live a maiden" ends up on the shelf:

Says I, "My stars and garters!
This here's a pretty go,
For a fine young maid as never was,
To serve all mankind so."
But t'other young maiden looked sly at me,
And from her seat she risen,

Says she, "Let thee and I go our own way,
And we'll let she go shis'n."

—A gem of a last line! Marriage was as simple as boiling water:

Within the space of half-an-hour
This couple a bargain struck,
Hoping that with their money
They both would have good luck.
"To your fifty I've forty,
With which a cow we'll buy;
We'll join our hands in wedlock bands,
Then who but you and I?"

They were strictly moral, these ballads. Fair Mollie is insulted at letting a lord murder his wife with his own penknife, to get her, preferring to wait seven years:

Now charming Mollee in her carriage doth ride,
With hounds at her feet, and her lord at her side.
Now, all ye fair maids, take a warning by me,
And ne'er love a married man till his wife die!

A flat stretch—and then the right royal song of Robert Burns, throbbing with cordial love:

O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June:
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune. . . .

And fare thee weel, my only Luve!
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it were ten thousand mile.

The tunefulness of this, as of *O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast* and many more, peers with Campion's; and the homeliness of it brings it nearer to the heart than the most refined luting.

Yet these are the parlor pieces; there are strains more appropriate to bedroom and bath. *The Jolly Beggars* gives a typical note, as when the maid sings:

> Full soon I grew sick of my sanctified sot,
> The regiment at large for a husband I got;
> From the gilded spontoon to the fife I was ready,
> I asked no more but a soldier laddie.

The Henpecked Husband would meet with an ovation from thousands of the meek slaves of the apron-strings:

> Were such the wife had fallen to my part,
> I'd break her spirit or I'd break her heart;
> I'd charm her with the magic of a switch,
> I'd kiss her maids, and kick the perverse bitch.

And then *The Lass That Made the Bed to Me;* and a general attitude,

> Their tricks and craft hae put me daft,
> They've ta'en me in, an' a' that;
> But clear your decks, and here's—"The Sex!"
> I like the jades for a' that.

Tuneful Sheridan resang an old tune:

> For let 'em be clumsy, or let 'em be slim,
> Young or ancient, I care not a feather;
> So fill a pint bumper quite up to the brim,
> And let us e'en toast 'em together.
> Let the toast pass!
> Drink to the lass!
> I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for a glass.

Perhaps the best expression, from a thoughtful source, of the double standard of morality—that which gives man permission to play around as he pleases, and blasts one slip on the part of the

woman—is found in Goldsmith's song from *The Vicar of Wakefield:*

When lovely Woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is—to die.

Any correction toward a single standard is anticipating by a hundred and sixty years.

iii.

The broader aspects of love—love of parents, of family, of nation, of all men, of the universe—are largely swallowed up in direct bodily love. Such love existed; it was as a rule reciprocated; it was not torrential on either side, as a general thing. There was no hungering and thirsting for it; no lifelong servitude to a hopeless passion for it; no vagrant dallying with constant fresh sources of it.

The reverse of the coin appears in outraged Lear's vinegary blessing on his daughter Goneril:

Hear, Nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful;
Into her womb convey sterility;
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her! . . .
—that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.

It was the opposite of general love—it was general hate, and warfare,—that rang loudest. Antony set the pit on fire with:

> A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
> Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
> Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
> Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
> And dreadful objects so familiar,
> That mothers shall but smile when they behold
> Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war.

Blood was the vulgar pap; patriotism braggadocio'd all over the stage, as in Henry V's roaring eloquence:

> On, on, you noble English,
> Whose blood is fet from fathers of war proof,
> Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
> Have in these parts from morn till even fought,
> And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument. . . .
> Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
> Cry "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"

Marlowe's sonorous *Tamburlaine* keyed the age:

> We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
> Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
> Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
> And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

Stern Milton trumpeted the alarum:

> Avenge, O Lord! Thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
> Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold.

No pacifism here.

Cavalier Lovelace sang to his Lucasta, as he entrained for the wars,

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.

James Thomson, at times under the patronage of the wealthy, sang the growing national greed of man:

When Britain first at Heaven's command
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of her land,
And guardian angels sung the strain:
Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves!
Britons never shall be slaves.

Goldsmith had sung the wealth of savage climes "Pillag'd from slaves to purchase slaves at home"; but this was at once drowned out in a bethlehem din, inspired by *Rule, Britannia.*

Burns was one of many who woke the Scottish glens with the trumpet:

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victorie! . . .

Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty's in every blow!—
Let us do or die!

William Cowper was a bit more critical. With his claim of Plantagenet blood, his brother being a lord chancellor, and with his melancholia which sent him to try suicide with poison, a penknife and his own garter, rather than suffer the embarrassment of being sworn in as a clerk of the House of Lords,—a melancholia which made him intermittently insane thereafter—he saw England with clearing accuracy:

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still. . . .
Though thy clime
Be fickle, and thy year, most part, deformed
With dripping rains, or withered by a frost,
I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies
And fields without a flower, for warmer France. . . .
And I feel
Thy follies too, and with a just disdain
Frown at effeminates, whose very looks
Reflect dishonour on the land I love.
How, in the name of soldiership and sense,
Should England prosper, when such things, as smooth
And tender as a girl, all-essenced o'er
With odours, and as profligate as sweet. . . .
Who love when they should fight,—when such as these
Presume to lay their hands upon the ark
Of her magnificent and awful cause?

Sir Walter Scott chanted love of country, that forerunner of love of all countries, in the declamatory eloquence of "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead." Even William Blake had his invocation to a rather spiritual sort of war, addressed with maccabre satisfaction to the soldiers that were to die that day. The glorious King James version of the Old Testament chanted a lord god of hosts, a god of battles. Old Drayton had spoken the people's soul in *Agincourt:*

Upon Saint Crispin's day
Fought was this noble fray
Which fame did not delay
To England to carry;
O when shall English men
With such acts fill a pen,
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry!

Even the mariners of England found their laureate in Thomas Campbell:

The meteor flag of England
Shall yet terrific burn;
Till danger's troubled night depart,
And the star of peace return.

Peace. . . . And Coleridge theming *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*—

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all;

after Burns's tribute of affection to the field mouse, and his lament over the mountain daisy, cresting in his roared prophecy:

For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

iv.

When we come to the expressions of the desire for beauty, this appears more indirectly than any of the previous desires. Man saw beauty everywhere: not, as Taine points out, that there was more beauty then than now; but that men were more vibrantly sensitive to it than their Hooverian descendants. Abstract hymns to beauty were largely absent; instead, line after line, poem after poem, blossoms with innate and unspoken appreciation of loveliness. Even a statement of the limitations of the day's stagecraft trembles with beauty:

Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt? . . .
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

Or take this exquisite—and biologically atrocious—picture of a beehive, from the same *Henry V:*

> Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
> Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds,
> Which pillage they with merry march bring home
> To the tent-royal of their emperor;
> Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
> The singing masons building roofs of gold.

Beauty surcharges this etching of the fleet moving, from the same play:

> Behold the threaden sails,
> Borne with the invisible and creeping wind,
> Draw the huge bottoms through the furrow'd sea,
> Breasting the lofty surge. O, do but think
> You stand upon the river, and behold
> A city on the inconstant billows dancing.

Music fared better. The Duke gave this chord to open *Twelfth Night:*

> If music be the food of love, play on;
> Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
> The appetite may sicken, and so die.
> That strain again! it had a dying fall;
> O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour.

The strain was frequent. John Dryden, in *Alexander's Feast*, lauded the flute and lyre of Timotheus and the organ of Cecilia alike:

> Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
> Or both divide the crown;
> He raised a mortal to the skies,
> She drew an angel down.

William Collins sang "When Music, heavenly maid, was young"; and altogether this art fared very well. Even prosy Wordsworth was stirred with the beauty of dancing daffodils recollected in tranquillity.

v.

The gods—and the devils, imps, merfolk, fairies, ghosts, and witches as well—were very near, in this early English song. Doctor Faustus, as Marlowe sang him, was an Icarus soaring on diabolic wings:

> For, falling to a devilish exercise,
> And glutted now with learning's golden gifts,
> He surfeits upon cursed necromancy—

upon magic, the summoning forth of the spirits of the dead, to work the will of the living. Ghosts did squeak and gibber in the Roman, the Danish, the English streets, as Hamlet's query indicated:

> Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell
> Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
> Have burst their cerements, why the sepulchre,
> Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
> Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws
> To cast thee up again.

Banquo's ghost did as much.

Puck and the fairies, in *A Midsummer-night's Dream*, wander everywhere, swifter than the moon's sphere; Mercutio, in *Romeo and Juliet*, rhapsodizes every detail of the visitations of Mab, the fairies' queen. Witches come at the devil's prompting, plaguing with their ancient power all renegades to the old Celtic faith. Their curse was heavy:

> I will drain him dry as hay;
> Sleep shall neither night nor day
> Hang upon his pent-house lid;
> He shall live a man forbid,

accurst. Their conjurations were revolting, obscene, and dear to the public heart:

> Finger of birth-strangled babe,
> Ditch-delivered by a drab,
> Make the gruel thick and slab,

or slimy. Middleton's, Ben Jonson's, countless other witches, were no prettier:

> I had a dagger; what did I with that?
> Killed an infant to have his fat.

A man's soul could be lost to the devil:

> And mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.

At least Shakespeare never made Satan the hero of a play, as Milton perhaps did with his epic:

> Princes, Potentates,
> Warriors, the flower of Heaven, once yours, now lost, . . .
> In this abject posture have ye sworn
> To adore the conqueror? . . . till anon
> His swift pursuers from heaven-gates discern
> The advantage, and, descending, tread us down,
> Thus drooping, or with linked thunderbolts
> Transfix us to the bottom of this gulf.
> Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen!

Moving above the casual singing of the people's ballads, we find all of the old deities vibrant. The fairies are here:

> As I was walking all alone,
> Atween a water and a wa,
> And there I spied a wee wee man,
> He was the least that e'er I saw.

A bonny maid tempts Clerk Colvill:

Then out he drew his shining blade,
Thinking to stick her where she stood;
But she was vanish'd to a fish,
And swam far off, a fair mermaid.

Lady Isabel, the first morning in May, pleads:

"If I had yon horn that I hear blowing,
And yon elf-knight to sleep in my bosom."

A nameless lady has her demon lover—a note Coleridge returned to, in one of the magical moments in *Kubla Khan.*

Bishop Corbet, son of a nurseryman of Surrey, mourned, in the *Fairies' Farewell,* the decay of the good old beliefs:

Witness those rings and roundelays
Of theirs, which yet remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days
On many a grassy plain;
But since of late Elizabeth,
And later, James came in,
They never danced on any heath
As when the time hath been.

The episcopal eyes are as dull as the episcopal verses.

Herrick's eyes saw no higher than woman's magnet, for all of his priestly function, as a rule; but George Herbert sang differently.

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee.

Let Ben Jonson tepidly hymn Diana, "queen and huntress, chaste and fair"; Herbert and Henry Vaughan sang otherwise, as in the latter's *Peace:*

My Soul, there is a countrie
Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentrie
All skilful in the wars.
There, above noise and danger,
Sweet peace sits crown'd with smiles,
And one born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.

No incongruity to the poet, in having the manger-born prince of peace generalissimoing the sentried hosts in the distant country. This was man's dream then. . . . And the God was always a patriotic God, ten-ninths of his interest wrapped up in the particular land that did the singing.

Edmund Waller had no doubt of immortality:

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made;
Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,
As they draw near to their eternal home.
Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,
That stand upon the threshold of the new.

Canon Richard Crashaw, recoiling from the licentious living of his fellow-attendants of Cardinal Palotta, was a disciple of Herbert's. Such poems as *To the Name Above Every Name, the Name of Jesus*, pulse with adoration of a personally orthodox deity. His hymn of the three kings indicates his extravagance of belief:

For Whom the officious Heavens devise
To disinherit the sun's rise.

Even addressing the "Weeper," Saint Mary Magdalene, he riots in his adoration:

Hail, sister springs!
Parents of silver-footed rills!

Ever-bubbling things!
Thawing crystal! snowy hills!
Still spending, never spent! I mean
Thy fair eyes, sweet Magdalene! . . .

And now where'er He strays,
Among the Galilean mountains,
Or more unwelcome ways,
Two walking baths, two faithful fountains,
Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
Portable, and compendious oceans.

John Milton had lifted strains more sedately orthodox:

Nor is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove, or green. . . .
Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
Can in His swaddling bands control the damned crew;
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harness'd angels sit in order serviceable.

Andrew Marvell, noted as another Puritan poet, uttered the song of the emigrants in Bermuda to their transplanted god:

He lands us on a watery stage
Safe from the storms, and prelate's rage. . . .
He hangs in shades the orange bright
Like golden lamps in a green night, . . .
He makes the figs our mouths to meet,
And throws the melons at our feet,

with no harm, we trust, to the feet or the melons.

Blake's dawn song hymned the lamb of God:

Little lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little lamb, I'll tell thee,
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a lamb;

and in more awed strains queries:

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? . . .
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

But the pagan heart would not down. Burns jibes at forgiveness of sins, as at much that was churchly:

O Lord! yestreen, Thou kens, wi' Meg—
Thy pardon I sincerely beg;
O! may't ne'er be a livin' plague
To my dishonour,
An' I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
Again upon her.

Besides, I farther maun allow,
Wi' Leezie's lass, three times I trow—
But Lord, that Friday I was fou,
When I came near her;
Or else, Thou kens, Thy servant true
Wad never steer her.

From *The Jolly Beggars* he shouts,

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

His *Address to the Devil* is rich in witchlore. It is nature's law that he praises; while the gargantuan *Tam o' Shanter* shows how the people filled their heaven:

Warlocks and witches in a dance;
Nae cotillion, brent new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathpreys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.

Only a running stream, in the end, stops the mad chase of the pursuing witches, led by Old Nick himself, the musician.

The pagan leaven was abroad. The gods and powers were diverse, numerous, and near; personal immortality was believed in or hoped for; and, in Shakespeare's sonnets and often elsewhere, the poet's immortality for his songs was vaunted.

vi.

When we come to knowledge, to intellectua. curiosity, the page is nearly blank.

People were too busy living to praise wisdom, or, indeed, to hunger even for it.

Pope saw man's wisdom as about as important as a teardrop in a flooding ocean: man—

In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reasons such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much;
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused. . . .
Go, wondrous creature! mount where science guides,
Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run;
Correct old time, and regulate the sun;
Go, soar with Plato to the empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
Or tread the mazy round his followers trod,
And quitting sense call imitating God;
As eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the sun.
Go, teach eternal wisdom how to rule—
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool! . . .

Trace science then, with modesty thy guide;
First strip off all her equipage of pride; . . .
Then see how little the remaining sum,
Which served the past, and must the time to come!

Isaac Watts, the liberal hymn-writer, of all people, granted most to the inquiring mind:

Thoughts should be free as fire or wind;
The pinions of a single mind
Will thro' all nature fly;
But who can drag up to the poles
Long-fetter'd ranks of leaden souls?
My genius, which no chain controls,
Roves with delight, or deep or high:
Swift I survey the globe around,
Dive to the centre thro' the solid ground,
Or travel o'er the sky.

But this was a faint voice, hardly heeded. Not yet had a Keats arisen, to exult:

Knowledge enormous makes a god of me.

That was still to come.

vii.

And the last desire—the desire to return: to return to things and places and hours left behind . . . and, in the end, to the primal lifelessness, or death. . . .

Simpler nostalgia, or homesickness, first. . . . Nicholas Breton, out of his lively life, was only in the fashion when he faced away to cry:

Had I got a kingly grace,
I would leave my kingly place
And in heart be truly glad
To become a country lad!

Pope was in the same wide fashion:

> See what delights in sylvan scenes appear!
> Descending gods have found elysium here,

a type of poetry popular as long as the poet and his audience had no idea of actually returning to country life, which actuality Crabbe has etched acidly for us. If they had returned to Nature, they would no doubt have found that Nature bit and pinched and stung them. But as long as it was merely a harmless yearning, it comforted, as in Blake's version of the same note:

> How sweet is the shepherd's sweet lot!
> From morn to the evening he strays;
> He shall follow his sheep all the day,
> And his tongue shall be filled with praise—

about as true a picture of an actual shepherd as it is of a spotted giraffe with a peacock's tail.

And now we are about to climb a hill—the first major eminence of this study. We have dealt with the desire for food, shelter, comfort; for love; for remoter loves; for beauty, God, wisdom, the return to youth. It might be held that some one of these held man's dearest wish: one of these, or a love for gold, or fame, or health, or some other specialized wish under one of these.

We know that poems represent wishes; that greatness in poetry means our recognition of some strong wish of our own in the poet's wish; and we have now turned the corner suddenly upon the field held by the poetry man agrees to call greatest. This is the poetry of the return to death. If the analysis is accurate, this is not only the underlying wish, but the most powerful of human wishes.

What are the facts?

Tragedy was the most popular stage presentation; and tragedy then meant the play where the principal characters died: a vicarious enjoyment of death thereby coming to the spectator. Old *Gorboduc* showed:

Lo, here the end of Brutus' royal line. . . .
The royal king and eye his sons are slain,

with red additions dear to the popular heart:

The wives shall suffer rape, the maids deflower'd,
And children fatherless shall weep and wail.

The Spanish Tragedy, that *Abie's Irish Rose* of its day, lists, at the end, Horatio, Serberine, Pedringano, Isabella, Prince Balthazar, the Duke of Castile and his wicked son, Bellimperia, Hieronimo himself, all meeting violent deaths. Give me, at least, death!

Even *A Midsummer-night's Dream* has Pyramus and Thisbe killed lingeringly in sport. *Julius Cæsar* holds true talk about death:

But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself . . .
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

Hamlet utters it all as a direct wish:

O that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

And then the slow melancholy music, significantly enough the favorite quotation from all Shakespeare:

To be, or not to be,—that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them. To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
The flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. . . .
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?

We may as well stop here for a moment. Those disposed to question the accuracy of interpreting works of art as expressions of wishes may try to explain, if they can, in some other fashion, why this is the favorite quotation from all Shakespeare; but they are likely to be permanently baffled by it.

The speech says one thing, and one only: Shall I kill myself, or not? Only the foggy fear of more suffering after death than life affords can prevent it. . . . Is this the trumpet call that the spirit of man lifts highest?

Not Portia's great plea for mercy; not Othello's magnificent farewell to war, when jealousy enters his soul; not Prince Hal's golden Harfleur speech, his soaring Crispin battle-cry; not Macbeth's skied poetry—except "Out, out, brief candle," echoing this same theme; none of the glorious love passages in *Romeo and Juliet* and softer idyls; none of the rollicking comedy—none of all this stays with us, soars over us, as our word, in the same way that this sobers sombre balancing of death against life, by the Danish meditator, stays with us.

Turn to perhaps the one book more beloved than Shakespeare,

the Bible, with its heartening religious comfort added to constant utter beauty of wording. There are six passages called greatest poetically, by common agreement. There is the twenty-third psalm, expressing bland confidence in God's provision for worldly wants. There is the ninetieth psalm:

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. . . .
Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.
In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.
For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. . . .
The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Then there is the golden passage from twelfth Ecclesiastes:

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bow be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern;
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

There is also the exquisite tribute to charity, or love, in thirteenth First Corinthians. There is the thunder of Yahweh's roll of his power and knowledge, and of the power of his created things, toward the end of Job—which, by the way, also contains,

Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?

There is also the trumpet-dream of assured immortality in fifteenth First Corinthians, including—

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The six best-beloved passages, esteemed the most poetic: and, of these, three are themed directly upon death; the other three deal lightly with it.

To return to Shakespeare, it is not the quality of word usage, word beauty, felicitous phrasing, that makes this soliloquy the most beloved: that is found to a higher degree in more than a score of other extended stretches in the poet's song. But the play, Hamlet, dealing with death—with arguments for and against suicide, and for and against revengeful murder—remains the most popular of all the plays, and is called the greatest by most voices; and the favorite single speech from all Shakespeare is the query, from the same play, to Hamlet's heart, Shall I kill myself, or not?

The play holds also the scene with the grave-diggers, and ends with the death of the queen, the king, Hamlet, Laertes, with Ophelia and Polonius accounted for before. This mortuary action won the acclaim of the spectators. They were pleased at the deaths—more pleased, than if the characters had lived. To put it bluntly, they willed the deaths, or underwrote the poet's willing of them, as expressing a desire for their own deaths.

A distinction is necessary here. If a hissed villain dies in a play, while the hero and the heroine—in whom the audience primarily identify themselves—live on happily, there is here only expressed a wish that the annoying persons in life die, while the spectator lives on. But when the hero and heroine, or those characters—like Macbeth—in whom the audience identify themselves primarily, die, the expressed wish of the auditor or spectator is toward death,—death for the auditor or spectator himself. It is so with *Hamlet*. It is so with *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lear*, *Othello*—with, in fact, all the great world tragedies, by the old definition.

We have lost some of the Elizabethan callousness to bloody killings, which made *Titus Andronicus* so popular, with Aaron's killing of the nurse, as he jested—

Weke, weke! so cries a pig prepared to the spit;

and the subsequent deaths of Chiron, Demetrius, Lavinia, Tamora, Andronicus himself, after Alarbus, Mutius, Bassianus, and a fly have been killed. But the heaven of death opened by the old tragedies is still popular.

Death is the predominant theme of the folk ballads, that intertwine their roots in the rootstock of the English race. The singers and hearers of these songs were near to the soil, knew what they wanted most, and got it. In *Henry Martin* England's "mariners are drown'd in the salt sea"; Sir Patrick Spens lies fifty fathoms deep, "wi' the Scots lords at his feet"; one of *The Twa Brothers* is killed; in *The Lass of Lochroyan* we have:

> And soon he saw his fair Annie
> Come floating o'er the main.
>
> He saw his young son in her arms,
> Both toss'd above the tide. . . .
>
> Then he's ta'en a little dart,
> Hung low down by his gore,
> He thrust it through and through his heart,
> And words spak never more.

The Babes in the Wood fare no better; Barbara Allen sings:

> My love has died for me today,
> I'll die for him tomorrow.

The gray mare, as well as all seven of the friends, die in *Widdicombe Fair;* and this was the terminus of the desire of almost all of the old ballads.

Cowley sings directly:

> Sleep, sleep again, my Lyre, and let thy master die.

Milton's beloved *Lycidas,* Gray's *Elegy,* Chatterton's—

My love is dead,
Gone to his death bed,
All under the willow-tree,

and a thousand more, all say the same thing: that man, after the faint slight toward will-o'-the-wisps of illusive escape from life's rigors, desires a return to youth, to the mother, and, more than any of these, to that earliest lifelessness out of which he came so recently, and into which he desires to return even more speedily than his sure journeying down the same quite road.

In the colonies that were to become our America, starvation, disease, vagabondage, laziness, perils of nature, sluggishly revengeful Indians: and an eye ever cast backward, to watch the heaven builded by the poets at home. What did the English heart seek in its heaven?

Wealth—all that the heart could desire, able to purchase all the comforts and luxuries possible for man's young mind to conceive. An end to the annoyances caused by court, church, nobles, justice, law, all men's cumbrous and oppressive social machinery. A tropic Paradise, where labor was unnecessary, in Virginia, Bermuda, or elsewhere. Everything wrong in England, except the system of noble control of the commoners, who were a sweaty rabble after all. Utter hell on earth to most of one's neighbors. An earthly paradise, without commerce, officials, education, riches, poverty, private ownership of land, and with general idleness. An end to warfare. At the least, a popular hero, like Robin Hood, to avenge popular wrongs. And, in the young song of Burns, democracy, and liberty.

Love—physical love—everywhere. Willing maids always ready for the tumble. Unchanging love—faintly; inconstancy more strongly. A touch of love of man for man. Any woman will do, attractive or the reverse. The devil take unwilling maids! And, to the moralizing mind, suicide for the erring maid, and a repentant repetition of the error for the man.

Wider love was to be restricted to England, or Scotland, or whatever the homeland happened to be. Fighting against this, a

quiet preachment of love for all of God's creatures, a stillborn cry for brotherhood of all men.

Beauty, especially in music, found in everything—men's senses registering it on every hand.

Jehovah, his son Christ, witches, fairies, elf-knights, mermaids, ghosts alike, believed in as realities. With a growing clamor against priests, prelates, and churches.

The brain, wisdom, dispraised as highly wanting; with a single voice speaking for freedom of thought.

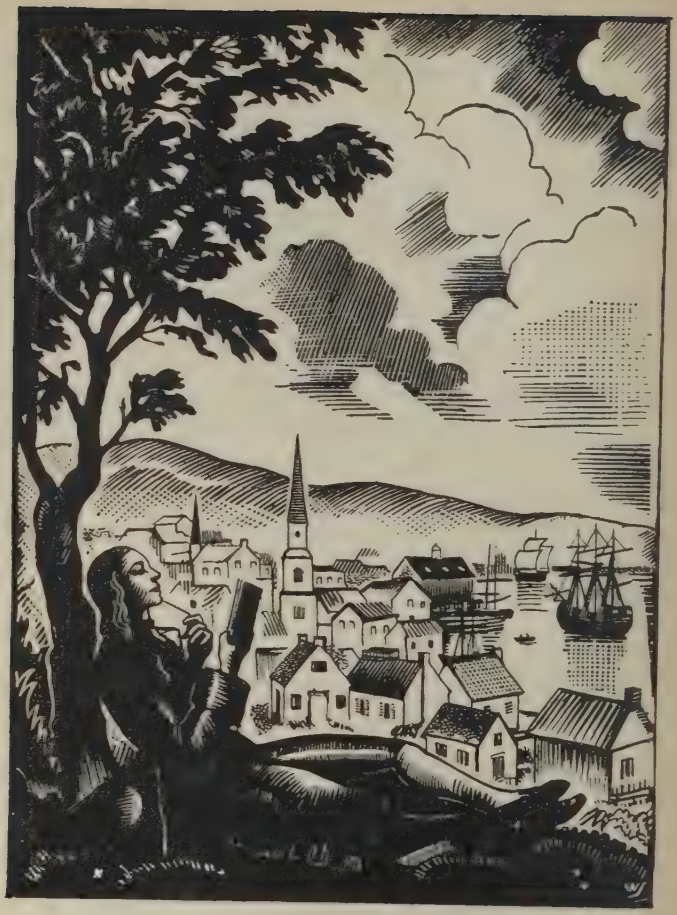
An overwhelming chorus for return to beloved scenes of youth, of childhood, and to the all-mother, death—with this as the dominant throughout the whole period, in the dramas, the court poets, the folk ballads equally. This overcast the favorite passages even from the Bible.

No word of antagonism to the crown, and a desire for a commonwealth: which, when it came, was short-lived enough.

Small word of the claim of labor to end noble and industrial oppression.

The world was all wrong; women should all yield, though they suicide after; death was man's chief goal—of these would heaven be built.

And the colonists digested all this, and, in the end, ceased to be colonists, and became a nation. They knew life at closer hand than the easy-livers of the homeland knew it. They sensed it at their finger's end, with death too near to be invited to come closer. They began to dream too, these colonists, and to sing. . . .



A COLONIAL PARADISE

"I never bent at Glory's shrine; . . .
I love thee, Ease, and only thee."

ALLEGHENY COLLEGE LIBRARY

III

A COLONIAL PARADISE

WHAT was it like, this vast sprawling continent that Europe, especially England, beached upon, penetrated, deforested, seeded with growing fields, villages, cities, slavery, democracy, churches, and brothels?

It was no Coney Island, no Atlantic City, at first. . . .

It took men even to fail here.

In June, 1578, Sir Humphrey Gilbert won a patent from the unmanned queen, allowing him for six years to take over any distant barbarous and heathen lands not possessed by any Christian prince or people.

Twice he and his half-brother, Walter Raleigh, were lashed back by the Spaniards. Their resources vanished; Raleigh was jailed twice for duels during 1580. One year before the patent ran out, Raleigh, knighted now and the queen's pet of the moment, strained his credit to send Sir Humphrey, so bankrupt that he had to sell the clothes off his wife's body for food, off on a final trip. On this Newfoundland expedition Sir Humphrey died.

Raleigh's men later settled Roanoke Island in North Carolina, squabbled with the Indians, lost heart, and deserted the continent. Raleigh flirted out of the queen's favor, dallied with death and adventure, passed into his sunset when he turned aside to seduce a comely maid of honor, and died at last at the stake.

In 1579, a son was born to George Smith, a thriving tenant-farmer on Lord Willoughby d'Eresby's Lincolnshire estate —a son named John. Before he was sixteen, the boy sold satchel, books, everything he had, to go to sea. His father died, paralyzing the plan. A patron took the boy to Orleans in his suite; and in France John Smith learned soldiering.

He fought in Holland. He toured Scotland. He shipped for Italy with pilgrims for Rome, was thrown overboard by them

as a heretic, reached an uninhabited island, and was rescued. He visited Egypt and the Levant; enlisted in Vienna under the emperor against the Turks, was enslaved by them, was beloved by Charatza Tragabigzanda. Her brother Timor, a pasha in Tartary, degraded the Christian captive; so John Smith slew the man with his threshing bat, escaped, gipsied through Europe and Morocco, and at length threw himself into Virginia colonizing.

The three ships of the expedition which he helped organize reached fern-treed Dominica and austere Nevis. Here a gallows was erected to hang Smith—Captain John now—for alleged conspiracy. He survived.

A lucky storm whistled the ships into Chesapeake harbor, Smith still under restraint, about to be sent back to England. Water had failed on the trip over; now the food dwindled down to a can of barley a day for five men, with only salt river water, slimed and filthy, to drink. Two-thirds of the colonists died in two-thirds of a year. He survived.

Smith went up the James to force maize from the half-hostile Indians. Three of his companions were barbarously murdered. His own head was pushed down on the Indian chopping-block; and then the chief's daughter, Pocahontas, laid her own head upon his, and saved his life again. He became the savior of the colony.

Then a rioting half thousand colonists came out, resumed preying warfare upon the Indians, planned to shoot temporizing Smith in his bed. His powder bag exploded, crippling him terribly, and sending him back to England. Seven-eighths of the rioters starved to death in six months.

Vigorous still, he explored the northern coasts of the continent as Admiral of New England, and died at fifty-two.

He wrote most of it out in adventurous prose, and still had time to write an occasional verse:

> If in or outward you be bound,
> Do not forget to sound;
> Neglect of that was caused of this
> To steer amiss.

The seas were calm, the wind was fair
That made me so secure
That now I must endure
All weathers, be they foul or fair.

It is futile to talk of what might have been. The colonists could not understand the Indians, these strange feather-hatted bowmen. And so they exterminated them, more thoroughly than rats and roaches are sprayed out of a modern city. The Indians were heathens, who smoked the devilish tobacco, went mad on boiled salads of jimson weed, drank the shattering black drink. They were intruders on European plans; the only good Indian was an embalmed one.

Meanwhile, the colonial idols were neither the scalped red men nor the too near colonial leaders: they were the delicatessen lordlings across the water. The colonies were no more weaned than baby kangaroos still in their mother's pouch.

The first verses written on an American theme was *Newes from Virginia: The Lost Flocke Triumphant,* by Richard Rich, a "soldier blunt and plaine" to use his self-description, who accompanied Sir Thomas Gates on the expedition described in the verses. They were printed in London in 1610, and thus described the daughter land:

Great store of fowle, of venison, of grapes and mulberries,
Of chestnuts, walnuts, and such like, of fruits and strawberries,
There is indeed no want at all, but some, conditioned ill,
That wish the worke should not goe on, with words doe seem to kill. . . .

The number of adventurers, that are for this plantation,
Are full eight hundred worthy men, some noble, all of fashion.
Good, discreete, their worke is good, and as they have begun,
May Heaven assist them in their worke, and thus our newes is done.

Some noble, all of fashion: it sounded enticing. A few years later George Sandys, courtly colonial treasurer of Virginia, chased

away his boredom on James banks, from 1621 onward, by translating Ovid, with Virginia in mind:

> And yet-free Earth did of her own accord
> (Untorn with ploughs) all sorts of fruit afford.
> Content with nature's unenforced food,
> They gathered wildings, strawb'ries of the wood,
> Sour cornels, what upon the bramble grows,
> And acorns, which Jove's spreading oak bestows.

For this translation, Dryden hailed Sandys as the best versifier of the age.

So far the South. As early as 1630, an unnamed New Englander wrote in Massachusetts:

> The place where we live is a wilderness wood,
> Where grass is much wanting that's fruitful and good:
> Our mountains and hills and our valleys below
> Being commonly covered with ice and with snow;
> And when the northwest wind with violence blows,
> Then every man pulls his cap over his nose:
> But if any's so hardy and will it withstand,
> He forfeits a finger, a foot or a hand.
>
> But when the Spring opens we then take the hoe,
> And make the ground ready to plant and to sow;
> Our corn being planted and seed being sown,
> The worms destroy much before it is grown;
> And when it is growing some spoil there is made
> By birds and by squirrels that pluck up the blade;
> And when it is come to full corn in the ear,
> It is often destroyed by raccoon and by deer. . . .
>
> Instead of pottagė and puddings, and custards and pies,
> Our pumpkins and parsnips are common supplies;
> We have pumpkins at morning, and pumpkins at noon,
> If it were not for pumpkins we should be undone.

At last the poet is beginning to look around him. The pumpkin is as thoroughly American as Billy Sunday was. The seed is being sowed for the American folksong, *Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-Eater*. . . .

i.

Pioneers feel an especial need of food, clothing, shelter—those irreducible necessities of life. And drink. . . .

Thomas Morton, a gentleman of Clifford's Inn, came to godly Plymouth in 1622. He was more red-nosed than blue-stocking. Within three years he had set up his goodly Maypole eighty feet high, and set all to singing his Maypole song:

> Drink and be merry, merry, merry boys,
> Let all your delight be in Hymen's joys,
> Io to Hymen now the day is come,
> About the merry Maypole take a room. . . .
> Lasses in beaver coats come away,
> Ye shall be welcome to us night and day.
> Make sweet garlands, bring bottles out,
> And fill sweet nectar freely about,
> Uncover thy head, and fear no harm,
> For here's good liquor to keep it warm.

Atheist was the least that the stricter Pilgrim Fathers called him, with charges—since girls were few—of "reviving the beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians."

Governor Bradford soured on the same colony:

> No drunkenness was then in thee,
> Nor such excess as now we see.

William Wood was one out of many cheerful chroniclers of the increasing food supply, as in this menu of shellfish:

> The luscious lobster, with the crabfish raw,
> The brinish oyster, mussel, periwig,
> And tortoise sought by the Indian's squaw,

Which to the flats dance many a winter's jig,
To dive for cockles, and to dig for clams,
Whereby her lazy husband's guts she crams.

Peter Folger, Benjamin Franklin's maternal grandfather, in 1675 published his *A Looking-glass for the Times, or the Former Spirit of New England Revived in This Generation*, picturing the meek New England saints thus:

'Tis easy to provoke the Lord
to send among us war,
'Tis easy to do violence,
to envy, and to jar.

To show a spirit that is high,
to scorn and domineer;
To pride it out, as if there were
no God to make us fear; . . .

To swear and lie, and to be drunk,
to backbite one another,
To carry tales that might do hurt
and mischief to our brother! . . .

All these and many evils more
are easy for to do;
But to repent, and to reform,
We have no strength unto.

Surely this can not be the righteous Puritan fathers! But the Puritan verses, diaries, sermons, laws amply bear this out, with itemized elaborations. Here's Puritan Thomas Shepard preaching in Boston: "Thy heart is a foul sink of all atheism, . . . blasphemy, murder, . . . adultery, witchcraft." Cotton Mather was especially interested in such offenses, and revelled, with the rest, in the grotesque executions of men guilty of violations of the Mosaic code against mismating, together with their strange paramours, as the pages of his own *Magnalia* attest. The South,

with its increasing Negro population, seems to have had more normal outlets for the throbbing sap of spring. Yet, of his experimenting group, Cotton Mather could sing:

> Know that th' eternal God, He's God,
> He made us, and we're His;
> We are His people, and we are
> The sheep which He doth feed.

Benjamin Franklin, born in 1706, wrote at the time when the greed of the mother country was stepping on the corns of the adolescent colonies. He hymned to England:

> We have an old mother that peevish is grown;
> She snubs us like children that scarce walk alone;
> She forgets we're grown up, and have sense of our own;
> Which nobody can deny.
>
> If we don't obey orders, whatever the case,
> She frowns, and she chides, and she loses all pati-
> Ence, and sometimes she hits us a slap in the face,
> Which nobody can deny.
>
> Her orders so odd are, we often suspect
> That age has impaired her sound intellect;
> But still an old mother should have due respect;
> Which nobody can deny.

Lovely split rhyme, that, in the middle stanza! Trust shrewd old Ben to sense first the young discontent! Something else he sensed, as his *The Mechanic's Song* established—that chant of tailors, masons, smiths, shoemakers, cabinet-makers, coachmakers, hatters, carders, spinners, weavers, and a score more, "Yet are all united, happy and free." Solidarity prophesied. . . . The man who works, outside of the romanticized farmer, has at last swaggered into poetry, overalls and all, not merely as a comic relief. It is no sweaty rabble now, but self-respecting mechanics, "united." . . .

John Seccomb, from nearby Medford, born two years later, listed, in *Father Abbey's Will*—"Father Abbey" being the sweeper, bed-maker, and bottle-washer to the Harvard students—the simple possessions of the time. The poem swept England and the colonies, with its bequest to the sweeper's wife of—

A tub of soap,
A long cart rope,
A frying pan and kettle,
An ashes pail,
A threshing flail,
An iron wedge and beetle. . . .

A spinning wheel,
One peck of meal,
A knife without a handle.
A rusty lamp,
Two quarts of samp,
And half a tallow candle,

with all the humble rest of it.

Bishop Berkeley, the English philosopher, during his years in New England, wrote the first memorable line in the new land's verse:

Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.

A bit premature and pat: the infinite future acts telescoped into one. But complimentary, no doubt of that.

The soft imitation of gardened English beauty was not wanting in American verse. Elijah Fitch, a homebred clergyman, pictured his ideal heaven in America:

When Aurora spreads her light
First in the morn, and last at night, . . .

Fresh at every hour should come
Wafting spices, myrrh, and gum. . . .
A placid stream with gentle tide
Meand'ring thro' a mead should glide,
Enamel'd o'er with every hue
Which on the earth yet ever grew,

and the genteel rest of it. Timothy Dwight, another Yale man, wrote more vigorously, as in this fling at a "smooth divine":

Smoked with each goody, thought her cheese excell'd;
Her pipe he lighted, and her baby held. . . .
"Let fools," he cried, "starve on, while prudent I
Snug in my nest shall live, and snug shall die."

David Humphreys, a revolutionary chum of Washington, was one among many men who described woman's attire:

Here custom, check'd in ev'ry rude excess,
Confines its influence to the arts of dress,
O'er charms eclips'd the sidelong hat displays,
Extends the hoop, or pares away the stays,
Bedecks the fair with artificial gear,
Breastworks in front, and bishops in the rear—

the bishops in the rear evidently referring to some articles of cloth, rather than to gentlemen of the same.

Joen Barlow, a distinguished publicist and zealot for American and French independence, wrote a mock epic upon the theme of *The Hasty Pudding*, an extended tribute to a favored viand. John Quincy Adams enlarged upon the little that man wanted here below:

What first I want is daily bread,
And canvas-backs and wine;
And all the realms of nature spread
Before me when I dine.

Four courses scarcely can provide
My appetite to quell,
With four choice cooks from France, beside,
To dress my dinner well.

There are two hundred lines of these humble wants.

In 1719, Thomas Fleet published from his press on Pudding Lane, Boston, *Songs for the Nursery, or Mother Goose's Melodies for Children*—Price, Two Coppers. Mother Goose was Fleet's wife Elizabeth Goose, originally Vertigoose; and this was the first appearance in type of these immemorial folk songs, that are the Old Testament of childhood. Many of the rhymes were brought over from England in the hearts of the colonists; some were improvised in America: but America gave them to the world. They ring with authentic poetry:

If I'd as much money as I could tell,
I never would cry old clothes to sell,
Old clothes to sell, old clothes to sell,
I never would cry old clothes to sell.

John Pierpont, of old New England stock, who tutored in Southern families and progessed from law into trade, uttered early a new type of drinking song:

Thou sparkling bowl! thou sparkling bowl!
Though lips of bards thy brim may press,
And eyes of beauty o'er thee roll,
And song and dance thy power confess,
I will not touch thee; for there clings
A scorpion to thy side, that stings!

Anti-liquor. . . . The stricter Puritan spirit of denial widened its aim, to include alcohol as one of its preys. It took two hundred years to bring this quarry down.

While the North was slowly girding on its reformistic overalls, the South was lifting odes to ease, in the writings of Richard Henry Wilde, a true lutanist, who fought his way out of an

enfeebled consumptive childhood into health, education, bookkeeping, the law, Congress, and, in 1834, to securing a majority of votes for speaker of the House. He wrote:

> I never bent at Glory's shrine;
> To Wealth I never bow'd the knee;
> Beauty has heard no vows of mine;
> I love thee, Ease, and only thee—

interesting enough, since he packed as much hard elementary labor into his lifetime as almost any dozen of his contemporaries. He spoke here for more than himself: this was his South speaking.

Edward Coote Pinkney, of a distinguished line of Maryland diplomats, living out his brief life in squabbles with his superiors in the navy and in hysterical failures to persuade someone—anyone—to fight a duel with him, was a genuine lyric poet, as rare spots of unborrowed beauty establish. He turned to Italy for the theme of this picture:

> The winds are awed, nor dare to breathe aloud;
> The air seems never to have borne a cloud,
> Save where volcanoes send to heav'n their curled
> And solemn smokes, like altars of the world.

Here is a lovelier stretch, from *To* (*Georgiana*)—and Poe caught much of his best music from this:

> The twilight heaven, so soft and blue,
> Meets earth in tender interview. . . .
> Upon the stirless shore no breeze
> Shook the green drapery of the trees,
> Or, rebel to tranquillity,
> Awoke a ripple on the sea;
> Nor, in a more tumultuous sound,
> Were the world's audible breathings drowned;
> The low strange hum of herbage growing,
> The voice of hidden waters flowing—

a surprising original note. He could be human, as this acceptance of a drinking invitation establishes:

> If I must fill more bumpers bright,
> I give indeed a pledge to sorrow,
> For I shall be dead drunk tonight,
> And sick as death itself tomorrow.

He was not partial to feasting, as a vigorous poem attests:

> Thus into wretched mirth
> Of hours, his life compress,—
> A miserable mass
> Of grief and drunkenness.

When John Trumbull's *McFingal*, a precocious little brother to *Hudibras*, swept London in 1776, the *Edinburgh Review* contented itself with the simple sneer, "the Americans have no literature." Trumbull passed his entrance examinations for Yale at the age of seven: draw any moral you please; and by twenty-two had written *The Progress of Dulness*, brilliantly satiric:

> The coxcomb trips with sprightly haste,
> In all the flush of modern taste; . . .
> Well pleas'd with eager eye runs o'er
> The lac'd suit glittering gay before, . . .
> The modish hat, whose breadth contains
> The measure of its owner's brains.

Of the women:

> And did you hear the news? (they cry)
> The court wear caps full three feet high,
> Built gay with wire, and at the end on't
> Red tassels streaming like a pendant;

to the view of the outworn belle,

Her stays for easiness thrown by,
Her rumpled handkerchief awry, . . .
All points of dress and neatness carried
As if she'd been a twelvemonth married.

This was a century and a half before the modern hour. Trumbull saw westward immigration more eloquently than Humphreys:

Where now the panther guards his den,
Her desert forest swarm with men;
Gay cities, tow'rs and columns rise,
And dazzling temples meet the skies; . . .
Till to the skirts of western day
The peopled regions own her sway.

So far, we have said little of the technique of poetry. The selections have spoken for themselves: the straightforward colloquial speech of Shakespeare at his best, and the songs of the better lyricists, advertise themselves. The anemic inversions and archaisms of others dispraise themselves with their stale odor. We will say little throughout this study on this theme: we are concerned with what the poets had to say: what was their dream, that phrased their land's dream, and built its heaven.

American poetry was still provincial to England—a mood it did not emerge from until Poe, Whitman, Lanier, Emily Dickinson, and the modern poets broke the shell of the goose-egg, and started quacking or warbling for themselves. Trumbull has two moods: a jolly rewrite of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras,* almost as keen-cutting as the riotous original; and a doleful rewrite of the melancholia of Gray, which, in Trumbull's case, is horrendously corpse-like. His word was more his own; his manner of speech was a loan at sight.

He was more original, at that, than most of his contemporaries.

Henry Pickering peered Barlow's hasty pudding tribute with a resonant ode to *The Buckwheat Cake;* Henry Cogswell Knight similarly lauded *The Country Oven:* but all three took their tune

from Pope's mock epic. William J. Grayson, a South Carolinian, etched his section in genteel verse:

> In quiet chat, before the hour of prayer,
> Masters and slaves in scattered groups appear.

Thus the Negro steps into poetry.

English song lacks women's voices; American women woke earlier. Sarah Josepha Hale, of New Hampshire, sang clangorously of *Iron:*

> "Iron! iron! iron!"—crashing
> Like the battle-ax and shield!
> Or the sword on helmet clashing,
> Through a bloody battle-field!
> "Iron! iron! iron!"—rolling
> Like the far-off cannon's boom;
> Or the death-knell, slowly tolling,
> Through a dungeon's charnel gloom! . . .
> Rightly read, beneath the splendor,
> Shining now on history's page,
> All their faithful witness render—
> All portend a better age.

The age of iron, the age of steel, the age of the atom, are on the way. Lydia Hunt Sigourney, whose mortuary spilth will appear soon, waxed Puritanically eloquent on the *Sale of Ardent Spirits by Christians*—Christians who apparently never themselves imbibed, in spite of Cana and the last supper: for—

> Not of the dire fount
> They drank themselves,—nor to their offspring gave—
> The pestilential draught;—they only prest
> Its venom to their weaker neighbor's lip,

and so on. The Eighteenth Amendment was rooted deep in the national heart.

ii.

As to love. . . .

Sporting with Amaryllis in the American shade, or with the tangles of Neaera's unbobbed hair, either was hardly known in America, or was conducted so facilely that it evoked few lyric wails. There was no lovesong of the experimental Puritan. John Seccomb, who had given Father Abbey's will, has the sweeper's relict wooed by the New Haven sweeper:

No teeth, 'tis true,
You have to show.
The young think teeth inviting;
But, silly youths!
I love those mouths
Where there's no fear of biting. . . .

A furrowed brow,
Where corn might grow,
Such fertile soil is seen in't,
A long hook nose,
Tho' scorned by foes,
For spectacles convenient;

but there is little of the tender passion here. James Bowdoin, scientific co-investigator with Franklin, governor of Massachusetts in 1785, and lifelong consumptive, sang rather wistfully of woman's charms:

Her tempting breasts the eyes of all command,
And gently rising court the am'rous hand—

True virtue and true modesty inspire
With love sincere, unmix'd with base desire.

How full of innocence her sprightly eye!
Which with the dove's in innocence may vie.

Trumbull saw his an hour in which—

Since pander-conscience holds the door,
And lewdness is a vice no more. . . .
There was an end, as oft Dick said,
For which alone the sex were made—

Of course, woman was simply "the sex": a man is always a human, a woman simply "the sex."

Each light coquette spread forth her charms,
And lured the hero to her arms.

His *Ode to Sleep* indicates that it is his mother he loved with all of his passion. In a dream he presses to his heart the dear deceit, and thinks the transport true. This mood never left America, from Trumbull to *Mother Machree*. We are the only land in the world with a Mother's Day: our god is the maternal apron-strings.

Thomas Godfrey, a Philadelphia glazier's son, author of *The Prince of Parthia*, the first drama written in America, sang in imitative courtly verse of Delia's postponement of Thyrsis' suit, which resulted in the swain's marrying elsewhere. Benjamin Church, son of a Rhode Island deacon, and a practicing physician, whose pen breathed defiance to English oppression, took his pattern for lovemaking from nature:

While sporting flocks in fond rotations court,
And to the thicket pair by pair resort,—

exhibiting an amazing ovine modesty usually wanting;

While tuneful birds in tender murmurings plead,
Chanting their amorous carols thro' the mead;
Link'd arm in arm we'd search the twilight grove,
Where all inspires with harmony and love. . . .
Ye wanton gales! pant gently on my fair,
Thou love-inspiring goddess meet us there!
While soft invited, and with joy obey'd,
We press the herbage, and improve the shade.

Even Puritan men had their avocations.

William Martin Johnson, a waif of vagabonds yanked up at the rope's end by a retired sea-captain, caught something of the cavalier spirit in *On a Snow-flake Falling on a Lady's Breast:*

Its touch, like mine, but serves to wake
Through all her frame a death-like chill—
Its tears, like those I shed, to make
That icy bosom colder still.

Washington Irving had a bit of this same tripping spirit:

Young head no lore will heed,
Young heart's a reckless rover,
Young beauty, while you read,
Sleeping dreams of absent lover.

Mother Goose pictured the reverse of connubial bliss:

O my little twopence, my pretty little twopence,
I love twopence better than my life;
I spent a penny of it, I spent another,
I took nothing home to my wife.

Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a man marries, his trouble begins.

Also the reverse of romantic wooing:

"What is your fortune, my pretty maid?"
"My face is my fortune, sir," she said.

"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid."
"Nobody asked you, sir," she said.

Curlylocks, Curlylocks, Wilt Thou Be Mine has a touch of the other, promising the beloved a diet of "strawberries, sugar and cream."

George Washington, in an acrostic to Frances Alexa, established that he was hardly first in love-poetry, for all that he became the father of his country:

> Long have I wish'd, but never dared reveal,
> Even though severely Love's Pains I feel;
> Xerxes that great, was't free from Cupid's Dart,
> And all the great Heroes felt the smart.

Pinkney's *Serenade* is a real lyric:

> Look out upon the stars, my love,
> And shame them with thine eyes,
> On which, than on the lights above,
> There hang more destinies.
> Night's beauty is the harmony
> Of blending shades and light;
> Then, Lady, up,—look out, and be
> A sister to the night!

Almost as lovely is his *A Health:*

> Her every tone is music's own, like those of morning birds,
> And something more than melody dwells ever in her words;
> The coinage of her heart are they, and from her lips each flows
> As one may see the burthened bee forth issue from the rose.

John Shaw, another Southerner, was of this singing kindred:

> Who has robb'd the ocean cave,
> To tinge thy lips with coral hue?
> Who from India's distant wave
> For thee, these pearly treasures drew?
> Who, from yonder orient sky,
> Stole the morning of thine eye?
>
> But one charm remains behind,
> Which mute earth can ne'er impart;

Nor in ocean wilt thou find,
Nor in the circling air—a heart!
Fairest, wouldst thou perfect be,
Take, O take that heart from me!

Maria Brooks, whom Southey renamed Maria del Occidente, admitted that women too thrilled to the love-itch:

Absent still! Ah! come and bless me!
Let these eyes again caress thee!
Once, in caution, I could fly thee!
Now, I nothing could deny thee;
In a look if death there be,
Come, and I will gaze on thee!

The boy probably arrived: the lady deserved this much.

And then there is, the one supreme love song of the period, this *Anacreontic*, by "A Gentleman of Virginia," published in 1736:

For me, (did Fate permit to use
Whatever Forms our Fancies chuse),
I'd be my lovely Sylvia's Glass,
Still to reflect her beauteous Face;
I'd be the pure and limpid Wave
In which my Fair delights to lave;
I'd be her Garment, still to hide
Her snowy limbs, with decent Pride;
I'd be the Girdle, to embrace
The gradual Taper of her Waist;
I'd be her Tippet, still to press
The snowy Velvet of her Breast;
But if the rigid Fates denied
Such Ornaments of Grace and Pride,
I'd be her very Shoe, that she
With scornful Tread might trample me.

There is a poem for America to be proud of. Compared to English song, there is little enough on this theme; there is nothing

on the byplays that Cotton Mather and the others railed so against.

iii.

If love of woman violetted itself largely out of sight, the antithesis of love of mankind—war—was fully present.

It first reared its head in a desire for divorce from the perverse old motherland, which insisted upon nourishing itself at the breast of its colony. It is uncertain who lifted this note first; but Jonathan Mitchell Sewell was early, with—

Vain Britons, boast no longer with proud indignity
By land your conqu'ring legions, your matchless strength at sea;
Since we, your braver sons incens'd, our swords have girded on,
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza, for War and Washington!

There are eleven more stanzas of this. Old Timothy Dwight quavered on:

> Columbia, Columbia, to glory arise,
> The queen of the world, and child of the skies!

Phyllis Wheatley, a slave straight out of Africa, sang like a Popess:

> Muse! bow propitious while my pen relates
> How pour her armies through a thousand gates,
> As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms
> Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;
> Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,
> The refluent surges beat the sounding shore,

and so on down to Washington, "first in place and honour."

Here are tons of ballad songs, commencing with Virginia's *Hearts of Oak*, borrowed at once by Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York for differing versions. Here are poems abjuring tea and tea-tables; here are pathetic battle ballads, like the one on the bombardment of Bristol:

With all their firing and their skill,
They did not any person kill;
Neither was any person hurt,
But the Reverend Parson Burt.

And he was not killed by a ball,
As judged by jurors one and all;
But being in a sickly state,
He, frightened, fell, which proved his fate.

To the tune of *British Grenadiers* we get a rousing roar ending:

Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza,
For free America.

Not a skirmish failed to produce its bumper crop of spirited ballads. The capture of André awoke a genuine Come-all-ye:

Come, all you brave Americans, and unto me give ear,
And I'll sing you a ditty that will make your hearts cheer.
Concerning a young gentleman whose age was twenty-two;
He fought for North America; his heart was just and true.

Greatest of all is *American Taxation:*

While I relate my story, Americans give ear;
Of Britain's fading glory you presently shall hear;
I'll give you a true relation, attend to what I say,
Concerning the taxation of North America.

Thirty-seven stanzas of this! The Britons misreport the colonists,

Their land with milk and honey continually doth flow,
The want of food or money they seldom ever know
They heap up golden treasure, they have no debts to pay,
They spend their time in pleasure in North America.

On turkeys, fowls and fishes most frequently they dine,
With gold and silver dishes their tables always shine;

They crown their feasts with butter, they eat and rise to play,
In silks their ladies flutter in North America.

And, after the taxation fails,

Confusion to the Tories, that black infernal name
In which Great Britain glories, forever to her shame!
We'll send each foul revolter to smutty Africa,
Or noose him in a halter in North America.

Sing it to *A Son of a Gambolier*. It has the real swing.

Trumbull's *McFingal* is accurate on British warfare:

Has she not set at work all engines
To spirit up the native Indians,
Send on your backs the tawny band
With each an hatchet in his hand,
T' amuse themselves with scalping knives,
And butcher children and your wives;
And paid them for your scalps at sale
More than your heads would fetch by tale? . . .
And has she not essay'd her notes
To rouse your slaves to cut your throats;
Sent o'er ambassadors with guineas
To bribe your blacks in Carolinas?

with further charges of intentional spreading of smallpox throughout the colonies, as well as forged Colonial money, to depreciate it. And here is Yankee Doodle, based on a Carolinian or Dutch tune, sung at Bunker Hill: the opposite of a rousing battle song, and hence illogically chosen at once as the colonial anthem.

Here is Joseph Hopkinson lifting *Hail Columbia* as a rallying song for a war with France that did not come off:

Immortal patriots! rise once more;
Defend your rights, defend your shore;

Let no rude foe, with impious hand,
Let no rude foe, with impious hand,
Invade the shrine where sacred lies
Of toil and blood the well-earn'd prize.
While offering peace sincere and just,
In Heaven we place a manly trust,
That truth and justice will prevail,
And every scheme of bondage fail.

It is dangerous for a land to begin singing of liberty and an end to all chains. In time the people may believe this, and act on it.

Here is Francis Scott Key writing a solemn *The Defense of Fort McHenry*, which Ferdinand Durang fitted to an English drinking tune, *To Anacreon in Heaven*, already used to bear the ponderous weight of Robert Treat Paine, Jr.'s horrendous *Adams and Liberty*. The poem of Key's was renamed *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and the new nation had at last the most unsingable of all national anthems:

And where is the band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave;
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

The Indians have been mentioned; warfare with them had produced a few mushroom ballads, half a century before the English stings began to itch. As Dwight sung in *The Destruction of the Pequods*, the Indians were not meek in battle:

Or told, with swimming eyes, how, long ago,
Remorseless Indians, all in midnight dire,
The little sleeping village did o'erthrow,
Bidding the cruel flames to heaven aspire,
And scalp'd the hoary head, and burned the babe with fire.

Lovell's Fight showed that the colonists had graduated in this technique:

Then having scalp'd the Indians, they went back to the spot,
Where they had laid their packs down, but there they found them not.
Among the casualties was "good young Frye,"
Who was our English chaplain; he many Indians slew,
And some of them he scalp'd when bullets round him flew.

Not to send peace, but a scalping-knife. . . . Mild, beside this, sounded Barlow's vision:

Till each remotest realm, by friendship join'd,
Link in the chain and harmonize mankind,
The union'd banner be at length unfurl'd,
And wave triumphant round the accordant world.

A bit premature, this vision of a yet unjetted United States of the World.

All the time *Mother Goose* taught the young idea, not to shoot, but to be kind to animals:

I love little pussy, her coat is so warm,
And if I don't hurt her, she'll do me no harm.

What a naughty boy was that,
Thus to drown poor pussy cat!

She whipped him, she slashed him,
She rode him through the mire;
I would not lend my pony now
For all the lady's hire.

And there was Mary's lamb, poor Cock Robin, and many another.

iv.

No word of beauty. Time for that later on.

v.

The emotional desires, toward morality and the good, God, heaven, immortality. . . . This is another tale.

The first book published in the colonies was *The Psalms in Metre, Faithfully Translated, for the Use, Edification, and Comfort of the Saints, in Public and Private, Especially in New England*—The Bay Psalm Book, appearing first in Cambridge in 1640, reprinted twenty-three times in America, and often in England and Scotland. There was poetry in the King James version: this proceeded, as in the 137th psalm—

Let cleave my tongue my pallate on
If mind thee doe not I,
If chiefe joyes o're I prize not more
Jerusalem my joy. . . .

O happie hee shall surely bee
That taketh up, take eke
Thy little ones against the stones
Doth into pieces breake.

The spiritual songs added to the second edition included this version of Jael's hospitality to Sisera:

Her right hand to the workman's maul
and Sisera hammered,
She pierced and struck his temples through,
and then cut off his head.

According to the verses, this had an immediate effect:

He at her feet bow'd, fell, lay down,
he at her feet bow'd where
He fell; whereas he bowed down
he fell destroyed there.

It appears that he did not recover from the blow.

Reverend John Cotton was grateful to God's providence:

> In mother's womb thy fingers did me make
> And from the womb thou didst me safely take;
> From breast thou hast me nursed my life throughout,
> That I may say I never wanted aught.

Upon his removal from Boston to the wilderness, Dr. Cotton was resigned to the situation:

> For when God saw his people, his own at our town,
> That together they could not hit it,
> But that they learned the language of Askelon,
> And one with another could chip it,

then God saw it was time to separate them, by persecuting the ministers and magistrates.

Yet the lot of the saints was not doubtful, as Governor John Winthrop indicated in a natal ode:

> Grow up, therefore, in grace,
> And fear his holy name,
> Who in thy mother's secret womb
> Thy members all did frame,
> And gave to thee a soul,
> Thy body to sustain,
> Which, when this life shall ended be,
> In heaven with him shall reign.

The government of heaven apparently was seen as an oligarchy, consisting of the trinity and the New England Puritan saints. Peter Folger's *Looking-Glass* described religion in Nantucket:

> Then many worthy persons were
> banished to the woods,
> Where they among the natives did
> lose their most precious bloods.

The cause of this their suffering
was not for any sin,
But for the witness that they bare
against babe sprinkling.

Here comes Michael Wigglesworth, author of *The Day of Doom, or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment, with a Short Discourse about Eternity*—a blissful compensation for his lung affliction that silenced his vocal pastorate, and unlocked him to sweet poesy. Six American editions, one London one, of this poem, which rivalled the Bible in popularity among the Puritans. It proceeded:

Still was the night, serene and bright,
when all men sleeping lay;
Calm was the season, and carnal reason
thought so 'twould last for aye.

God came to man while in his cups:

The excellence of whose presence
and awful Majesty
Amazeth Nature, and every Creature
doth more than terrify. . . .

Mean men lament, great men do rent
their Robes, and tear their hair;
They do not spare their flesh to tear
through horrible despair.

Judgment is pronounced. The infants, who suggest that damnation is too strict for them, are assured, that though—

in bliss
they may not hope to dwell,
Still unto them he will allow
the easiest room in hell.

The damned wring their hands, gnash their teeth, gnaw their tongues, roar with horror, at the judgment:

> But get away without delay,
> Christ pities not your cry;
> Depart to hell, there may ye yell
> and roar eternally.

About as Christian as a stinging nettle. . . .

Wigglesworth's *Meat Out of the Eater, or Meditations Concerning the Necessity, End, and Usefulness of Afflictions unto God's Children: All Tending to Prepare Them for and Comfort Them under the Cross* is more optimistic:

> O Christ, make haste, from bands
> of sin and death me free,
> And to those heavenly mansions
> be pleas'd to carry me.
> Where glorified saints
> for ever are possest
> Of God in Christ their chiefest good,
> and from all troubles rest.

Hats off to Joseph Green, who satirized his friend, the witty divine Mather Byles. Green said that Byles found an oversight in David's psalms, in omitting a proper one to sing at sea. The ambitious bard proceeds to complete the part where David failed:

> With vast amazement we survey
> The wonders of the deep,
> Where mackerel swim, and porpoise play,
> And crabs and lobsters creep.
>
> Fish of all kind inhabit here,
> And throng the dark abode.
> Here haddock, hake, and flounders are,
> And eels, and perch, and cod.

When tempests rise, the psalm proceeds,

Our heads to tottering motion feel,
And quickly we become
Giddy as new-dropped calves, and reel
Like Indians drunk with rum.

Samuel Peters, the "Parson Peters" of *McFingal*, before his return to England to be beheaded ultimately for his religion at the time of the restoration, sang affectionately of his deity. His *Last Legacy to an Only Child* concluded:

And above all,
to live yourself to see
Married to Him
who must your Savior be.

This Catholic attitude is unexpected in Puritan theology. President Dwight got in his side knock at a disliked carpetbagger divine:

While Curl discloses to the raptured view
What Peter, Paul, and Moses never knew;
The light of newborn wisdom sheds abroad,
And adds a leanto to the word of God,

A delightfully homely architectural note.

Richard Henry Dana, recovering from a sickly Cambridge childhood to study law in Baltimore, phrased his strong belief in personal immortality:

O, listen, man!
A voice within us speaks the startling word,
"Man, thou shalt never die!" Celestial voices
Hymn it around our souls; according harps,
By angel fingers touch'd when the mild stars
Of morning sang together, sound forth still
The song of our great immortality.

Mrs. Sigourney is a new kind of pious laureate—the minnesinger of the Christian missionary. She urges Christian humility:

Press not thy purpose to thy god,
Urge not thine erring will,
Nor dictate to the Eternal mind,
Nor doubt thy Maker's skill.

She has written on *Missions to Africa*, *Death of a Missionary to Ceylon*, *Parting Hymn of Missionaries to Burma*, *Moravian Missions to Greenland*, *Departure of Missionaries for Ceylon*, *The New Zealand Missionary*, and many more:

And what hath Earth compared to this?
Knows she of wealth or joy like thine?
The ransom'd heathens' heavenly bliss,
The plaudits of the Judge divine!

The poets slowly learned that the salvation was too often accompanied by Occidental rum, patent medicines, venereal diseases, machinery, and industrial exploitation. But the theme had its skirted troubadour once.

Closer to the people's hearts than this was the note struck by Clement C. Moore, a New Yorker, of St. Nicholas' own city, concerning the annual visit from the saint—a note still high in the hearts of all children:

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings were hung by the chimney, with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

There is loveliness in it:

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below.

Then the saint's appearance:

His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow. . . .
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly.

The stockings are filled:

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

vi.

Mrs. Sigourney also lauds the establishment of a Female College in New Granada, South America, and of another in Greece. Intellectual curiosity is soaring a trifle.

Charles Sprague, son of one of the Boston tea party, uttered an ode to *Curiosity:*

It reign'd in Eden—when that man first woke,
Its kindling influence from his eyeballs spoke; . . .
It reign'd in Eden—in that heavy hour
When the arch-tempter sought our mother's bower. . . .
"Eat," breathed the fiend, beneath his serpent guise,
"Ye shall know all things; gather, and be wise!"

Curiosity sits, darkly brooding, over the embryo mind of the child; it masters man in every changing hour:

It tempts him from the blandishments of home,
Mountains to climb and frozen seas to roam;
By air-blown bubbles buoy'd, it bids him rise,
And hang, an atom in the vaulted skies;
Lured by its charm, he sits and learns to trace
The midnight wanderings of the orbs of space;
Boldly he knocks at wisdom's inmost gate,
With nature counsels, and communes with fate.

Mountain and polar exploration, balloon voyages, star-study—here man grows conscious of that trait, curiosity, unknown in the lowest savages, but vital to mental maturity. Sprague confesses the intricacy of his subject matter:

> How swells my theme! how vain my power I find
> To track the windings of the curious mind.

Even the rich money-grubber thrills to it too, he says; and the mob press for the wildest sensations, preferably spiced with sex, inspired by the same curiosity—plus a motive Sprague does not dream of, the opportunity to adventure thus vicariously, in the downs and ups of the persons participating in the sensations.

And then the poet calls men back, to turn his curiosity on that exquisite book, nature, which he calls loftier: not that it is loftier, but that it is more unknown; and a panacea to a soul oversick with civilization. The vast forest, the depths below the sea's smirking face, these he recommends; then the world of books, religion, philosophy, poetry. . . . The illusion that the dead live on he finds sweet, and unanswerable; and the same curiosity drives man to seek to penetrate the veils of the future.

It is the same motive which brings you to this book, and holds you here.

Not that the future is directly touchable; or that poetry is essential to it. But the future lies curled up inside the womb of man's dreams of today. The dreams and wishes are real, as the present is real, as the future will be. Poetry is a clinical thermometer we can stick into the feverish mouth of the patient, man, to let us read from it our diagnosis of his ills, and chart out the probable future course of his maladies, with what chances he has for improvement. Heaven is tomorrow's symptom, of wilder fever or recovery.

Sprague's verse is over-pretty; but it says something largely new. Intellectual curiosity, that rebel son who has dethroned at last all the gods and the philosophies, has found a tongue at last.

Phyllis Wheatley, the Negro slave, long before had sung exquisitely of *Imagination*, a slightly more usual theme:

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,
The empyreal palace of the thundering God,
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling universe behind;
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,
Or with new worlds amaze the unbounded soul.

But this, for all its ornate finish, falls below Sprague's more searching study.

Trumbull was more conventional—more in the mood of Pope. He addresses "Vain man"—

The glimmering lamp of reason's ray
Was given to guide thy darksome day.
Why wilt thou spread thy insect wings,
And strive to reach sublimer things?
Thy doubts confess, thy blindness own,
Nor vex thy thoughts with scenes unknown.
Indulgent heaven to man below
Hath all explain'd we need to know;
Hath clearly taught enough to prove
Content below, and bliss above.

Thanks, Master Trumbull: you word it clearly, and aid in bringing out the error. What you say of man's glimmering reason is true. But it is all he has. It glimmers less, at that, than the animal's lower reason. What you say of heaven is what its votaries claim: that it has explained all man needs to know. This is doubtful, since it omitted all explanation of the molecule, the atom, the ductless glands, vitamines, the airplane, the radio . . . consult any outline of science for some of its omissions.

There is not content below: if there were, this would mean stagnation and death. There is not, except by disbelieved rumor,

bliss above. The old dispensation of faith and superstition held this: Sprague speaks for the new dispensation.

The conquerors of the world's secrets—the Darwins, Mendels, Pasteurs, Einsteins, Edisons, Millikans, and a thousand others,—speak for the new. They tend to bring, not content below, but comfort and happiness below. They do not bother about above. No more than they bother with the Ashanti certitude that man, after death, lives on the other side of the moon, dressed in the skins of red leopards, eating forever the hearts of his enemies, and forcing daily a score of enemy maids and wives. Thus things must be so, the Ashanti hold: religion has taught them. But curiosity, and its child science, have other worlds to conquer.

vii.

There was always the backward look. Benjamin Tompson, "learned schoolmaster and physician, and y^e^ renowned poet of New England," who was born ten years after Boston was, and died at seventy-four, dreamed back to the simpler colonial life before his time:

> From western isles ere fruits and delicacies
> Did rot maids' teeth and spoil their handsome faces.

Governor William Livingston, a Revolutionary agitator and warrior from New York, looked backward for his heaven:

> Me to sequester'd scenes ye muses guide,
> Where nature wantons in her virgin pride;
> To mossy banks, edg'd round with op'ning flowers,
> Elysian fields and amaranthine bowers,
> To ambrosial founts, and sleep-inspiring rills,
> To herbag'd vales, gay lawns, and sunny hills.

This is all Watteau. No one was there to tell the good governor that the actual heaven on earth he wished was not a hybrid between stale Greek mythology and dreary English landscapes. He probably wished to go to Skaneateles or Secaucus; but, in verse,

he thought he had to say it like a copy-reader pasting misplaced fragments of Pope together.

Richard Alsop, forty years later, knew what he wanted:

> Some future day, the traveller haply come

to view the ruins of Philadelphia and "fair Bostonia" will find nothing except some socially unacceptable birds left, plus—

> Slow rears the rattlesnake his glistening crest,
> And fills with deathful sounds the dreary waste.

The wish below this is for an end of America's civilization: a return to the unmanned wilderness: a rest and respite from all human living. Alsop celebrated Jefferson's inaugural in 1805 with a poem extolling the Indian:

> Few were his wants, and his desires but few,
> No bliss beyond his pipe and squaw he knew,

a bit of an understatement; but he was closer to truth when he went on,

> . . . Civic feasts with Indians suit but ill,
> And rum and whiskey are contriv'd to kill,
> That what the whites the "light of reason" call
> Is but another name for cheating all.

As the Indian vanished as a menace, it became fashionable to envy their imagined life, as different from the real thing as autobiography is from truth.

William Cliffton, a cultured, sickly Philadelphia Quaker, spoke his longing:

> Me, shall some little tranquil thatch receive,
> Some settled low content, remote from care,
> There I will pipe away the sober eve
> And laugh all day at Lady Fortune there.

More Watteau. Long before, Augustine Washington, the first president's father, had done better, in the anonymous *True Happiness:*

> These are the things which, once possessed,
> Will make a life that's truly blessed: . . .
> A merry night without much drinking,
> A happy thought without much thinking;
> Each night by quiet sleep made short;
> A will to be but what thou art.

An improvement on Martial. President Tyler, another Virginian, wrote, without religious overtones:

> Speed on, my vessel, speed thee fast,
> Swift o'er the briny sea;
> I am going to my home at last,
> Where there's peace and rest for me.

None of these pierced to the public heart. But Samuel Woodworth was luckier. Born the youngest son of a revolutionary soldier at Scituate, Massachusetts, ten years after Yorktown; largely unable to secure education,—he pushed himself forward until he was editor, publisher, printer, and, at times, carrier, of the *Belles Lettres Repository* of New Haven, for the two months of its existence. Baltimore knew him; during the war of 1812, he conducted a monthly Swedenborgian magazine in New York, mellifluously entitled *The Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, which petered out. Several of his poems first appeared in *The Complete Coiffeur; or an Essay on the Art of Adorning Natural and Creating Artificial Beauty*, by J. B. M. D. Lafor, Ladies' Hair Dresser, 1817. One of his songs stands out, as so far the most heart-gripping expression of the desire to return:

> How dear to this heart are the scenes of my childhood,
> When fond recollection presents them to view;
> The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,
> And every loved spot which my infancy knew.

The wide-spreading pond, and the mill which stood by it,
The bridge and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket which hung in the well.
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket which hung in the well.

There is everything right with this as a song. It has lost some of its tang for later sophisticated ages, who were started drinking out of individual sanitary paper cups from an antiseptic filter; and have never manipulated a well-sweep, or thrilled to the elixir of the icy nectar that earth hoards. The plumbered faucet has killed some of the song's appeal, a mechanical cyanide which can not be regretted. The song lives on, to most of us, as an unkeyed strangely sweet mystery.

There is a faint thrill in Caroline Gilman's *The Plantation*, from Charleston, with its revocation of gumtree, chinquapin, myrtle, holly, Spanish moss, trumpet-vine and other loved chums of my childhood. But the poetess invites us to "list the mockbird's lay"; and such Watteau phrasing harms what beauty the verses might otherwise have.

It is otherwise with John Howard Payne, son of an eminent Long Island schoolmaster, who made his debut, aptly enough, in one of Samuel Woodworth's numerous periodical ventures, a juvenile atrocity called *The Fly*. By thirteen, Payne was editing his own paper; within a year, he had sailed for Albany to attend Union College; at sixteen, he made his debut on the stage; earned some applause, more hisses, much poverty, some name, and at last wrote a song which made everyone connected with it wealthy—except himself: even gaining, for the actress who first sang it, a wealthy husband.

Just before he died, as American consul at Tunis, the same song was still the popular favorite, and reached his ears in that faroff place: for years its strains ended every dance in America. This little song from the opera *Clari* proceeded:

'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.

A charm from the skies seems to hallow it there,
Which, go through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home, Home, sweet, sweet Home!
There's no place like Home! there's no place like Home!

He knew what the next verse meant: jailed, execrated, bewildered and baffled in England, with East Hampton incurably vanished into that casually abandoned heaven, the past:

An exile from home, splendor dazzles in vain;
O give me my lowly thatched cottage again!
The birds singing gaily, that came at my call,—
Give me them,—and the peace of mind, dearer than all!

His mother had died while the boy was in college; his father, during a Boston engagement. Well, give them a brief life again in the song: slim fare, but memory and life would now grant no more:

How sweet 'tis to sit neath a fond father's smile,
And the cares of a mother to soothe and beguile!
Let others delight 'mid new pleasures to roam,
But give me, O, give me, the pleasures of home!

One way back only; and that a quieter way than many thought. But phrase the wish bravely: for one man's heart-hunger was, here at least, every man's heart-hunger, and other hearts would know. . . .

To thee I'll return, overburdened with care;
The heart's dearest solace will smile on me there;
No more from that cottage again will I roam;
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
Home! Home! sweet, sweet Home!
There's no place like Home! there's no place like Home!

Death's austere sovereignty had fascinated the colonial poets from the beginning. Pastor Edward Bulkley, of Concord, in-

dited *A Threnodia upon Our Churches' Second Dark Eclipse, Happening July 20, 1663, by Death's Interposition between Us and that Great Light and Divine Plant, Mr. Samuel Stone,* which punned away in grisly fashion:

> A stone more than the Ebenezer fam'd;
> Stone splendent diamond, right orient named,

calling the corpse also a whetstone, a loadstone, a slingstone, and much more. Governor Dudley of Massachusetts spoke of his own death:

> Dim eyes, deaf ears, cold stomach show
> My dissolution is in view;
> Eleven times seven near lived have I,
> And now God calls, I willing die.

He was the bitter Puritan to the end:

> Let men of God in courts and churches watch,
> O'er such as do a toleration hatch;
> Lest that ill egg bring forth a cockatrice,
> To poison all with heresy and vice.
> If men be left, and otherwise combine,
> My epitaph's, *I died no libertine.*

Almost two hundred years later, Judge St. George Tucker, of Virginia, wrote stanzas more acceptable to the popular heart:

> Days of my youth, ye have glided away;
> Hairs of my youth, ye are frosted and gray;

reasonably accepting,

> Days of my age, ye will shortly be past;
> Pains of my age, yet awhile ye can last;

and concluding that the hopes of his age would be fixed on his God. It was something to die in those days. When Dr. James McClurg of Virginia died in 1825, upon his stone was inscribed thirty-seven lines of ornate prose, including:

In old age
cheerful and tranquil,
his mental faculties unimpaired,
the serenity of his temper undisturbed,
even his social gayety hardly clouded to the last
by the decay and infirmities of his body,
honored, beloved, revered,
content to live, content to die,
with equal mind he sunk to rest.

Who could resist dying, with such an obituary to follow?

Philip Frenau, the most accepted poet of the Revolutionary epoch, wrote excellently of an Indian burying ground. The fact that the Indian was buried in a sitting posture indicated, Frenau said, that his soul would be active afterward. He visioned:

By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,
In vestments for the chase arrayed,
The hunter still the deer pursues,
The hunter and the deer—a shade.

This last line the English poet Campbell did not hesitate to take over a little later; just as Scott borrowed another impressive line from the same American source.

Richard Alsop elegied his mother's grave in the mood of Gray:

And though no more than this inglorious stone
Of all life's anxious vanities remain,
Peace! dull oblivion hides not me alone,
But over bards and kings extends his reign.

Richard Henry Wilde's loveliest song, out of his beloved South, was themed upon the briefness of life:

My life is like the summer rose
That opens to the morning sky,
But ere the shades of evening close
Is scatter'd on the ground—to die!
Yet on the rose's humble bed
The sweetest dews of night are shed,
As if she wept the waste to see—
But none shall weep a tear for me!

My life is like the autumn leaf
That trembles in the moon's pale ray,
Its hold is frail—its date is brief,
Restless—and soon to pass away.
Yet, ere that leaf shall fall and fade,
The parent tree will mourn its shade,
The winds bewail the leafless tree,
But none shall breathe a sigh for me.

My life is like the prints, which feet
Have left on Tampa's desert strand;
Soon as the rising tide shall beat,
All trace will vanish from the sand;
Yet, as if grieving to efface
All vestige of the human race,
On that lone shore loud moans the sea,
But none, alas! shall mourn for me.

This is a lyric note not unworthy to prelude the skylark song of Keats and Shelley.

Trumbell spoke eloquently of death:

Through toilworn years fatigued with restless care,
Peace, sought in vain, awaits us in the grave.

James Kirk Paulding, of Dutchess County, New York, wrote vigorously *The Old Man's Carousal*, too ghastly to be liked:

And here's—but, alas! the good wine is no more,
The bottle is emptied of all its bright store;
Like those we have toasted, its spirit is fled,
And nothing is left of the light that it shed.
Then, a bumper of tears, boys! the banquet here ends,
With a health to our dead, since we've no living friends.

Death was the signal for a Niagara of lachrymose elegies. It was made a sort of gala hour, like a Mississippi public lynching, with barbecue and soda-pop concessions. Other occasions were of doubtful Puritanic morality: births, and even more so marriages, had uncertainties connected with them, amounting to probabilities, of unhappiness in the future; but death ended the chapter, and gave every chance for grieving rejoicings. This chance was not overlooked.

Samuel Hardy, a brilliant Virginia congressman who died in 1785, thus benisoned the departure of one Michael Young:

The curtain's drawn—the awful scene is past—
My once respected friend has breathed his last. . . .
Terrific death with all its dire parade
A conquest of his mortal part has made. . . .
Harmonious numbers never more to sound.
Alas! he's gone; he moulders in the ground. . . .
He fell beneath the cruel tyrant's power,
Nipped in his bloom, like some fair vernal flower.

Watteau on a tombstone: real mortuary verse.

Maria del Occidente was one among many women who uttered laments for the departed. But Lydia Hunt Sigourney was the champion of all the obituary poets, with no second in telescope view. In one volume she has more than forty-seven separate poems on the death of somebody or other: *The Dead Horseman, Death among the Trees, Death of the Wife of a Clergyman, Death of a Young Wife, Burial of Two Young Sisters, Death of a Young Lady at a Retreat for the Insane, Death of a Son, Death of a Lady in Havana, Funeral in a New Colony, The Grave, "To Die is Gain," Death of a Former Pupil, Death of a*

Young Musician, Voice from the Grave of a Sunday-School Teacher, The Dying Boy, Death of a Friend, Death of an Aged Man, The Muffled Knocker, The Death of the Motherless, Funeral at Sea, Burial of Ashman—an anticipatory *Spoon River*. *The Grave* shows her mood:

Why, O Grave!
Giver of rest to Earth's o'erladen ones,
Whose love doth shame our friendship, and whose care
Treasureth what Memory scatters,—why with haste
Of bitter loathing, turn we from thine arms?

There was a constant surcharge of Christian feelings, as in the elegy to the motherless:

With what a tide of boundless bliss,
A thrill of rapture wild,
An angel mother in the skies
Will greet her cherub child.

These versified epitaphs were produced in too wholesale a manner to be of high poetic quality. She is more effective in her tribute to *Indian Names:*

Ye say, they all have passed away,
That noble race and brave;
That their light canoes have vanished
From off the crested wave;
That, 'mid the forests where they roamed,
There rings no hunter's shout;
But their name is on your waters—
Ye may not wash it out.

'Tis where Ontario's billows
Like Ocean's surge is curled;
Where strong Niagara's thunders wake
The echo of the world;

Where red Missouri bringeth
Rich tribute from the West,
And Rappahannock sweetly sleeps
On green Virginia's breast.

Death came too swiftly to the colonists, at first, to permit time for even a polished epigram or a pious epitaph. They died; but the living stuck. Courtly Virginia leeched on to the tidewater flats; rigid Plymouth, Massachusetts, Connecticut, more frigid colonies, carving up all who served god with a comma different from their own service; elegant Maryland, buccaneering Carolinas, formal New York, gentle Pennsylvania, and a few more, each conquering the wilderness in its own way; each aiding in uprooting the French; each building inwardly a sense of union with the rest, that came in handy soon enough.

And then, revolt. . . . The colonists won against a divided homeland, magnificently mismanaged. They squirmed around in the Napoleonic entanglements, and, barring a burnt national capitol and a few upsets, told themselves that they had licked the world again. The Indian graves had ended the problem of scalping; and the West was slowly deforested and deflowered into maize fields. A breathing spell, and then a dark problem arose in the very heart of the land.

In this dawn hour for the white dwellers on the old continent, the heaven built was merely an altered version of the homeland Eden. But it was altered.

The merry Maypole did not thrive, transplanted into God's sour-graped vineyard. Petty vices did, and so did eccentric satisfactions of the love force. America acquired the mimic vices of the affected homeland; with an awakened Puritanic feeling against drink. The wilderness was to blossom like a transmogrified London. The West was to yield. . . . There was much to enjoy physically in the New World; but never quite enough for all.

Love, in the pictured heaven, was a bit anemic: the hearty gusto of merry England was gone. Woman was still to be adored; but her adorers were few.

A whole symphony orchestra hymned patriotism, Columbia, the

gem of the non-British ocean, foul Tories, noble patriots, Yankee Doodle, the land of the free, the home of the brave. If the Indians scalped, scalp 'em back. Be kind to animals.

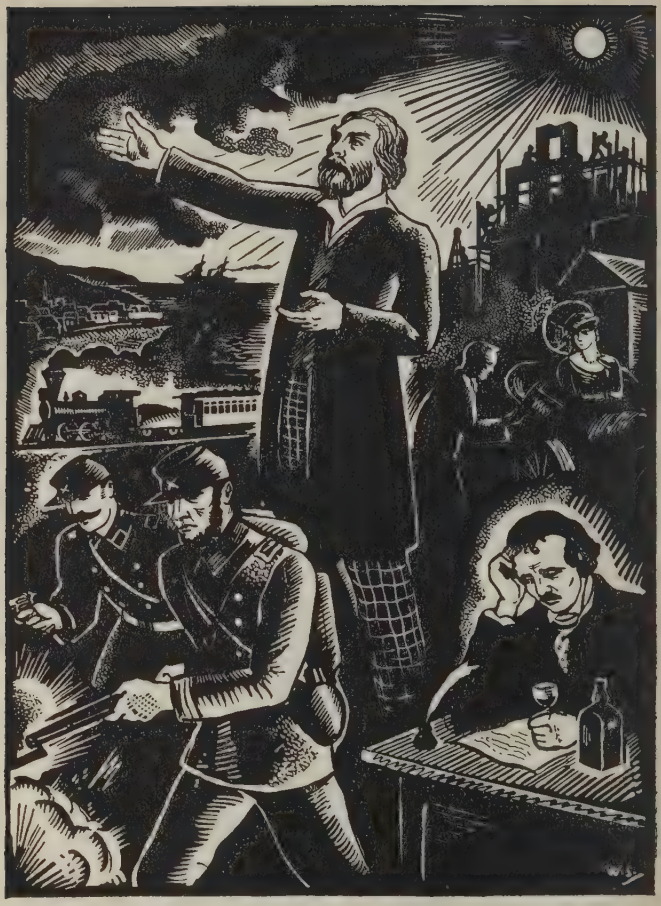
Beauty was a long gap.

All the gods were functioning efficiently. Unorthodoxy about baby sprinkling naturally caused martyrdom; infants unbaptized were allotted a suite in an elevator apartment in hell; sinners received as much mercy as a turkey at Thanksgiving. Santa Claus came into his own, even if he only came once a year, and then down the chimney.

Intellectual curiosity at last received its place; though the majority of voices still carped at it, emphasizing man's limitations.

And there was the dominant cry of back to childhood, back to the memory-sweetened home. Life was a brief pain; death brought rest. After death, a hope for immortality. . . . Even the dead Indians lived on in the names of streams and hills.

Out of the bassinet, now, into the beginning of a national literature.



THE MOTTLED SKY

"Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost."

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IV

THE MOTTLED SKY

THE decades from 1800 onward were a tough and turbulent time. The appearance of a new book was the signal for bowie knives and heavy artillery. In genteel England, the sneers of the sterile critic tribe killed John Keats, and stung Byron into the savage vigor of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. It was the *Edinburgh Review* that greeted Trumbull's *McFingal* with the charitable axblow, "America has no literature."

America was cruder than England.

One of the more ox-like critics—John Keese, in his 1839 *The Poets of America*—surveyed the field thus:

> American poetry has hitherto been little more than a happy accident, and seems to have arisen in spite of the practical tendencies of our country and the prosaic character of our time.

The same moan has mumbled down all our ages. The more practical and prosy our living, the more surely the soul will long, in poetry, for something besides a paycheck and a skinny tough turkey once a year.

Among America's earlier literary gunman critics was the Rev. Rufus W. Griswold, remembered solely because he slung searing libels on Poe's name, the moment the poet died. Griswold grouched that America's sense of liberty had been lost, her patriotism had died, her democracy had yielded to aristocracy: all three, he said, were due to a lack of a copyright wall which would keep competing English books out of America. His vision was hardly broader than a mud-turtle's. His highest praise for prose or poetry was to say that it was uniformly respectable.

Thomas Buchanan Read, Griswold's anthological rival, pur-

loined from Griswold's books, and then turned around and said that the errors in the notes he had stolen proved that Griswold was worthless as an authority.

There were others: and there was a king among them. Griswold stung dead Poe like a corpse-flea; but Poe, living, had been a slug-hammer critic, whose warped waspish disposition sickened at the lauded mediocrity around him, while his own genius was sneered at. He hurled himself on Thomas Dunn English, formerly Brown (who wrote Ben Bolt and lived on until this writer was fourteen), with bitter vindictiveness:

> Mr. Brown has at least that amount of talent which would enable him to succeed in his father's profession —that of a ferryman on the Schuylkill.

This was literary criticism! Brown wrote "I am just"; Poe discovered that "—an ass" had been omitted by typographical blunder. He proceeds,

> About his appearance there is nothing very remarkable —except that he exists in a perpetual state of vacillation between mustachio and goatee. In character, a *windbeutel.*

Poe later sued English-Brown for libel, and won a verdict of two hundred and fifty dollars: more money than he ever earned for any of his writings during his lifetime.

Poe lanced Thomas Ward for calling eyes, in his verse, weepers and sparklers; for denominating Madeira wine as "the rosy"; and for other astounding practices. The only things remarkable about William W. Lord's compositions, said Poe,

> are their remarkable conceit, ignorance, impudence, platitude, stupidity, and bombast . . . (He is) absurdly ignorant of the commonest principles of grammar.

Of William Ellery Channing's verses,

> They are full of all kinds of mistakes, of which the most important is that of their having been printed at all.

To him, *The North American Review* was "that ineffable buzzard." He wrote under such mild titles as *Mr. Longfellow and Other Plagiarists*. And he was a brilliant critic, establishing his cases repeatedly. As such, he was unforgiven, vilified alive, and exhumed and roasted dead by such nonentities as Griswold and Professor Trent.

He was milder, at that, than some. James Wood Davidson, in his 1869 *The Living Writers of the South*, exhibits his gentle prejudice in granting this notice to one writer, in a book of 635 pages:

> ORVILLE HORWITZ.
>
> This writer resides in Baltimore. Has written *Gleanings by the Wayside.*
>
> Is a Jew.

Short and bitter. Real pioneer days in literature: like the pioneer cutthroat days in the movie industry today.

Out of the backbiting, poetry began to emerge. . . .

i.

William Cullen Bryant, who wrote his best verses before he was eighteen, was one of the acclaimed mediocrities. He wrote prettily of nature:

> Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
> Near to the nest of his little dame,
> Over the moutain-side or mead,
> Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:
> Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
> Spink, spank, spink;

Snug and safe is this nest of ours,
Hidden among the summer flowers,
Chee, chee, chee.

This was splendidly adapted for high school elocution work. A similar gurgle could be sung for the sperm whale, a similar trumpet for the bull elephant. But it is no more poetry than a solo on a tissue-papered comb is music.

Reverend Charles W. Everest sang of the farmer's life:

How blest the farmer's simple life!
How pure the joy it yields!
Far from the world's tempestuous strife,
Free, mid the scented fields!

When morning woos, with roseate hue,
O'er the far hills away,
His footsteps brush the silvery dew,
To greet the welcoming day. . . .

Ho! monarch, flush'd with glory's pride!
Thou painted, gilded thing!
Hie to the free-born farmer's side,
And learn to be a king!

Unspeakably sub-Watteau.

Jane Tayloe Lomax Worthington, a Virginian, was closer to reality in *The Poor:*

Have pity on them! for their life
Is full of grief and care;
You do not know one half the woes
The very poor must bear;
You do not see the silent tears
By many a mother shed,
As childhood offers up the prayer,
"Give us our daily bread."

Alfred B. Street's *The Settler* sags down to the former mood:

> The soul that warmed that frame, disdained
> The tinsel, gaud, and glare, that reigned
> Where men their crowds collect;
> The simple fur, untrimmed, unstained,
> This forest tamer decked.

Fitz-Greene Halleck, in *Alnwick Castle,* talked truetalk as direct as Housman or Chesterton:

> These are not the romantic times
> So beautiful in Spenser's rhymes. . . .
> 'Tis what "our President," Monroe,
> Has called "the era of good feeling";
> The Highlander, the bitterest foe
> To modern laws, has felt their blow,
> Consented to be taxed, and vote,
> And put on pantaloons and coat,
> And leave off cattle-stealing;
> Lord Stafford mines for coal and salt,
> The Duke of Norfolk deals in malt,
> The Douglas in red herrings;
> And noble name and cultured land,
> Palace, and park, and vassal band,
> Are powerless to the notes of hand
> Of Rothschild or the Barings.

William Allen Butler's world-girdling *Nothing to Wear,* picturing Miss Flora McFlimsey, of Madison Square, after eighteen weeks' shopping for clothes in Paris, and her engagement—

> Without any . . . Blushes, . . . or such silly actions,
> It was one of the quietest business transactions,
> With a very small sprinkling of sentiment, *if* any,
> And a very large diamond, imported by Tiffany,

has her refuse to go with her fiance to a ball, because of her hundreds of gowns she has nothing to wear. She taunts the man,

> Your silly pretense—why, what a mere guess it is!
> Pray, what do you know of a woman's necessities?

The engagement is broken up over this; and the lover addresses the whole group of fashion's entirely spoiled pets:

> Oh! ladies, dear ladies, the next time you meet,
> Please trundle your hoops just outside Regent Street, . . .
> To the alleys and lanes where misfortune and guilt
> Their children have gathered, their city have built; . . .
> Raise the rich, dainty dress, and the fine broidered skirt,
> Pick your delicate way through dampness and dirt. . . .
> To the garret, where wretches, the young and the old,
> Half starved and half naked, lie crouched from the cold,
> See those skeleton limbs, those frost-bitten feet
> All bleeding and bruised by the stones of the street.
> Hear the sharp cry of childhood, the deep groans that swell . . .
> Hear the curses that sound like the echoes of hell, . . .
> Then home to your wardrobes, and say, if you dare—
> Spoiled children of Fashion—you've nothing to wear!

Abraham Lincoln, in his ballad *The Bear Hunt*, pictured the revenge of the frontiersmen on bears that preyed on their swine:

> The foremost ones now reach his rear;
> He turns, they dash away,
> And circling now the wrathful bear
> They have him full at bay. . . .
>
> And furious now, the dogs he tears,
> And crushes in his ire—
> Wheels right and left, and upward rears,
> With eyes of burning fire.

But leaden death is at his heart—
Vain all the strength he plies,
And, spouting blood from every part,
He reels, and sinks, and dies!

Lincoln might have made a name for himself, if he had stuck to poetry.

America was changing. Even Bryant could see what was happening to the forests:

Will not man
Seek out strange arts to wither and deform
The pleasant landscape which thou makest green?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an authentic fragmentary poet, surveyed the whole in a way strangely to predate Einstein:

Line in nature is not found;
Unit and universe are round;
In vain produced, all rays return,
Evil will bless, and ice will burn.

He indicted the world like a belated Elizabethan:

Goodby to Flattery's fawning face;
To Grandeur with his wise grimace;
To upstart Wealth's averted eye;
To supple Office, low and high.

He speaks of "the insanity of towns"; and utters a hymn to man's spirit:

God said, I am tired of kings,
I suffer them no more;
Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor. . . .

Pay ransom to the owner,
And fill the bag to the brim.
Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
And ever was. Pay him.

Evidently the dark shadow is spreading. Poe, giant in his own dim heaven, spoke of man, including himself, as

Some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster, till his songs one burden bore,
Till the dirges of his Hope the Melancholy burden bore
Of "Never—nevermore."

To Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a placid moralizing soul, there was but one cure for slavery:

He did not feel the driver's whip,
Nor the burning heat of day;
For Death had illumined the Land of Sleep,
And his lifeless body lay
A worn-out fetter, that the soul
Had broken and thrown away!

Usually he was more patly moralistic, reviving the outworn didactic or teachy-preachy poetry, as in:

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

This was before the Ford factory plan required each worker to begin nothing and end nothing, but merely to do daily a thousand little fractions of a thousand ambiguously unfinished jobs.

John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker and propaganda versifier, was the real anti-slavery bard. He has a Yankee girl reject a Southerner's proposal:

Go back, haughty Southron! thy treasures of gold
Are dim with the blood of the hearts thou hast sold;
Thy home may be lovely, but round it I hear
The crack of the whip and the footsteps of fear! . . .

Full low at thy bidding thy Negroes may kneel,
With the iron of bondage on spirit and heel;
Yet know that the Yankee girl sooner would be
In fetters with them, than in freedom with thee!

Pick your own punishment. . . . There was much more of this:

God and our charter's right,
Freedom for ever!
Truce with oppression,
Never, oh! never!

Whittier wrote apostrophes to ship-builders, shoemakers, drovers, fishermen, farmers, lumbermen, in an idyllic mood reminding of Franklin: as accurate a picture of actual working conditions as a *Wall Street Journal* report from soviet Russia. He woke into real poetry when aging Daniel Webster turned compromiser in slavery at the end:

Oh! dumb be passion's stormy rage,
When he who might
Have lighted up and led his age,
Falls back in night. . . .

Let not the land, once proud of him,
Insult him now,
Nor brand with deeper shame his dim,
Dishonored brow. . . .

All else is gone; from those great eyes
The soul has fled.
When faith is lost, when honor dies,
The man is dead!

Oscar Montgomery Lieber, son of a distinguished South Carolina professor, in 1847 besought Congress to open a ship canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in resonant verses:

Cleave America asunder,
This is worthy work for thee.
Hark! The seas roll up, imploring
"Make the ocean free!"

A big order for an inter-oceanic ditch: yet America's heaven—her longed-for future—included this note. Epes Sargent, a distinguished dramatist, uttered a vibrant sea-song:

A life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling deep,
Where the scattered waters rave,
And the winds their revels keep!
Like an eagle caged, I pine
On this dull, unchanging shore;
O! give me the flashing brine,
The spray and the tempest's roar!

Oliver Wendell Holmes, more spottily gifted than Bryant, Longfellow, or Lowell, lyricized the steamboat:

With clashing wheel, and lifting keel,
And smoking torch on high,
When winds are loud, and billows reel,
She thunders foaming by.

John G. Saxe, a Vermont lawyer, lauded a life on the rail:

Singing through the forests,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Whizzing through the mountains,

Buzzing o'er the vale,—
Bless me! this is pleasant,
Riding on the rail!

An amusing prophecy appears in *An Exquisite of the Year 1929 at Breakfast,* by Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, in *Random Shots and Southern Breezes,* appearing in 1842:

Tell John to set the kettle on,
I mean to take a drive;
I only want to go to Rome,
And shall be back by five.

Tell cook to dress those humming-birds
I shot in Mexico;
They've now been killed at least two days,
They'll be *un peu trop haut.* . . .

The trip I took the other day
To breakfast in the moon,
Thanks to that awkward Sir Bellaire,
Has spoiled my new balloon. . . .

Such fellows ought to keep below,
And never venture there;
If he's so clumsy, he should go
By no way but the Bear.

My steam is surely up by now—
Put the high pressure on;
Give me the "breath-bag" for the way—
All right—hey—whizz—I'm gone!

He did everything but mention Lindbergh.

Stephen Collins Foster, the beloved popular song writer, a Pennsylvanian who woke the land to minstrel songs, joined in the anti-alcohol chorus, with *Comrades, Fill No Glass for Me:*

To drown my soul in liquid flame,
For if I drank, the toast would be
To blighted fortune, health and fame.

There was a growing chorus of "Go West, young man, go West." William D. Gallagher, himself from Ohio, was one of these boosters:

Land of the West!—thy early prime
Fades in the flight of hurrying Time. . . .
And thy broad plains, with welcome warm,
Receive the onward-pressing swarm. . . .
O, may they come with hearts that ne'er
Can bend, a tyrant's chain to wear;
With souls that would indignant turn
And proud oppression's minions spurn!

Adah Isaacs Menken, the much-married beauty whose Mazeppa made her the toast of America and Europe, spoke more for the bewildered artist than for the industrial progress of the land:

Souls for sale! souls for sale!
Souls for gold! who'll buy?
In the pent-up city, through the wild rush and beat of
human hearts, I hear this unceasing, haunting cry:
Souls for sale!

No bidders. . . .

And now comes a different poet upon the scene: one hailed, for his burly swaggering braggadocio, as the voice of pioneer America. His very rhythms, the sedate academic pigmies squeaked, were as crude as log-cabins and homespun.

His rhythms were subtler, more sophisticated, a thousand-fold more original than all the New York and New England echoes. The backwoodsman was as puzzled by them as if they had been written in neo-Hottentot: he pinned his faith to the soothing syrup of Longfellow, rejecting the tonic of Whitman. But

the academes of his day never understood Walt. His seed came to harvest in an erysipelas of polyrhythmic poetry half a century later.

He expressed pioneer America: he was dumb enough, naive enough, to do so. This made two-thirds of what he said a quack Indian herb remedy, sold under an acetylene torch from the stern of a mule-wagon. But one-third of what he said was poetry as mature as the soul of man had become. Poe was great in a small dark way; Emerson and even Holmes had a few crumbs of greatness; but Walt Whitman let the universe speak.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I shall assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you. . . .

I do not snivel the world over
That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth. . . .
I wear my hat as I please indoors or out. . . .
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

Then this burst of star-music:

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass, . . .
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time. . . .

I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be. . . .
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
For room to me the stars kept aside in their own rings. . . .
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it,
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,

Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited
it with care. . . .
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

The latest word from science, respoken as the heart's word. It took a good deal of a man to feel and sing this.

Such a man could not fail to stand four-square against all slaveries—chattel, and the subtler later slaveries. He had to be the poet of all men, deeming himself lower than the lowest —his peculiar mental sickness: the same sickness that caused him, as compensation, to dub himself a cosmos.

See, mechanics busy at their benches with tools—see from among
them superior judges, philosophs, Presidents, emerge, drest
in working dresses,

which does not disfigure much recent European history; although in America the judges and the rest more frequently emerge from Morgan's office, dressed in cutaways. Since he felt himself so small, and itched to see himself larger, he had to make everything equi-sized:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the
stars. . . .
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And a cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

No, he could not visualize a sextillion. A cow need not surpass the Venus de Milo: she gives more milk, but lasts less and sells for less. An infidel does not regard a mouse as a miracle. Now we have Walt in his naïveté: an adorable old ranter, soused in his own eloquence.

But this is fresh air in the stale room of American poetry. This is fresh technique, in a hall of whispering echoes. This is cathartic truetalk, in a land sick of costive droolings. The mouse America has uttered a mountain.

ii.

When we come to love. . . .

The weaker sex had a difficult time of it. William Leggett, driven by poverty from New York to rude Illinois, spoke for the betrayed frail in a weepy *Song:*

Thy faithless vows betrayed me,
They may betray her too.

But no!—may she ne'er languish
Like me in shame and woe:
Ne'er feel the throbbing anguish
That I am doomed to know!
The eye that once was beaming
A tale of love for thee,
Is now with sorrow streaming,
For thou art false to me.

The reader will find this a tearful journey.

Nathaniel Parker Willis, a New Yorker of a family of editors, won Poe's high commendation with his *Unseen Spirits,* which themes on the same string:

No mercy now can clear her brow
For this world's peace to pray;
For, as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way!—
But the sin forgiven by Christ in heaven
By man is curst alway!

Emma C. Embury speaks for her own sex: but the tone is the same:

Oh, well I knew what had dimmed her eye,
And made her cheek so pale;
The maid had forgotten her early song,
While she listened to love's soft tale;

She had tasted the sweets of his poisoned cup,
It had wasted her life away,—
And the stolen heart, like the gathered rose,
Had charmed but for a day.

In the present liberal hour, it seems incredible that love's soft tale could do all this. But the sky lowered with Puritanism: it was wrong for woman to yield to love; although it was natural, and although men sought it. The poets' wish is for the wooing to be spoken, the woman to yield, and then to wither away like a plucked squash.

Even men were sentimental in their approach. Thus Frederick William Thomas, a Baltimore emigrant to Ohio, serenaded his fair:

E'en as the wounded bird will seek
Its favorite bower to die,
So, lady! I would hear thee speak,
And yield my parting sigh.

This does not mean that he would reject the lady: but that her voice is so fatal, that one word from her would end him. Bayard Taylor, who trekked all over Europe, expected more longevity for his affection:

Look from thy window and see
My passion and my pain;
I lie on the sands below,
And I faint in thy disdain.
Let the night-winds touch thy brow
With the heat of my burning sigh,
And melt thee to hear the vow
Of a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!

James N. Barker, out of his eyrie in the Treasury Department at Washington, author of *How to Try a Lover* and other dramatic compositions, gives a brilliant skit on *Little Red Riding Hood*, in which the grandma instructs the little girl on the fairy tale:

> In a word,
> The wolf that you must guard against is—Love. . . .
> A wolf . . . in ravenous appetite,
> Unpitying and unsparing, passion is oft
> A beast of prey.

And then the granddaughter queries:

> This wolf, the story goes,
> Deceived poor grandam first, and ate her up:
> What is the moral here? Have all our grandmas
> Been first devoured by love?

There was a Younger Generation even then.

Rufus Dawes grows very noble, when loving somebody else's wife:

> I would not have thy married heart
> Think momently of me—
> Nor would I tear the cords apart
> That bind me so to thee;
> No! while my thoughts seem pure and mild,
> Like dew upon the roses wild,
> I would not have thee know
> The stream that seems to thee so still,
> Has such a tide below!

Bryant pictures the age's idea of woman:

> Maidens' hearts are always soft;
> Would that men's were truer!

Halleck spoke observantly:

> What is man's love? His vows are broke
> Even while his parting kiss is warm—
> But woman's love all change will mock,
> And, like the ivy round the oak,
> Clings closest in the storm.

This was before the gold-digging sirens clung to their golden prey only as long as the gold held out.

The Puritan attitude disapproved tunefully of a widower's early second marriage. Jonathan Huntingdon Bright, out of witch-burning Salem, uttered *He Wedded Again:*

> Ere death had quite stricken the bloom from her cheek,
> Or worn off the smoothness and gloss from her brow,
> When our quivering lips her dear name could not speak,
> And our hearts vainly strove to God's judgment to bow;
> He estranged himself from us, and cheerfully then
> Sought out a new object, and wedded again. . . .
>
> But can *she* be quite blest who presides at his board?
> Will no troublesome vision her happy home shade,
> Of a future love luring and charming her lord,
> When she with our lost one forgotten is laid?
> She must know he will worship some other star then,
> Seek out a new love, and be wedded again.

There is no suggestion that the oncoming of the third will be hothoused in any way: the mere idea is enough, in the poet's mind.

The Reverend Walter Colton, a Vermonter who brightened Yale with his passing, advocated suicide as a cure for unrequited love. There are more breathing cures. Mothers were coming into more than their own; passionate strains were being addressed to them by their sons; but this was in its comparative infancy.

The women were not so neolithic-minded. Frances Sargent

Osgood, beloved of Poe and others, wrote *Your Heart Is a Music-Box, Dearest:*

> And there's one little tune it can play,
> That I fancy all others above—
> You learned it of Cupid one day,
> It begins with and ends with "I love!"
> "I love!"
> My heart echoes to it, "I love!"

No man is going to quarrel with this; or with her more popular song,

> Call me pet names, dearest! call me a bird,
> That flies to thy breast at one cherishing word. . . .
> Call me sweet names, darling! call me a flower,
> That lives in the light of thy smile each hour. . . .
> Call me pet names, darling! call me thine own!
> Speak to me always in love's low tone!

The lady was popular, not less so for singing:

> Alas! I am but a woman, fond and weak,
> Without even power my proud, pure love to speak.

Sarah L. P. Hickman Smith, a native of Detroit, was more in the Puritan pattern, as when she apostrophised *White Roses:*

> Their summer life was stainless,
> And not like hers who wore them;
> They are faded, and the farewell
> Of beauty lingers o'er them.

Channing queried:

> O see her hair, O mark her breast!
> Would it not, O! comfort thee
> If thou couldst nightly go to rest
> By that virgin chastity?

Yes, says Mr. Poe, we think, upon the whole, it would. Little of the Puritan in him. . . .

Romantic love was rarely phrased with more loveliness than in the despondent young poet's *To Helen*, addressed to the mother of a schoolmate whom he regarded as his mother:

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicean barks of yore,
> That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
> The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
> To his own native shore. . . .
>
> Lo! in yon brilliant window niche
> How statue-like I see thee stand,
> The agate lamp within thy hand!
> Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
> Are Holy Land.

All intangible. . . . No dream even of melting passion. For this beloved is from the regions which are holy land: the realm that holds mothers. And Poe's mother was in the grave.

His *To My Mother*, addressed to Mrs. Clemm, his mother-in-law, clarified this strain. His heart was in the coffin there with his mother; and so he placed, in poem and story, his loves always in the coffin. *The Raven* pictures the situation—the long-bereaved poet, seeking some word from the dead beloved. *Ulalume* madly repeats the same strain; *Annabel Lee* holds it; so do *For Annie, Lenore, Politian:*

> (The) mirror . . . answers me.
> It speaks of sunken eyes, and wasted cheeks,
> And beauty long deceased. . . .
> Whispers of early grave untimely yawning
> For ruined maid.

To One in Paradise magically repeats the same formula:

> Ah, dream too bright to last!
> Ah, starry Hope! that didst arise. . . .
> But to be overcast! . . .

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams!

Why was this exquisite song so perennially popular? Did all men wish their beloved women dead?

Poe did: but he was abnormal in life and dream.

Man married one of this "frail sex," so amply described already. And then the evil fairies slipped a changeling into the nuptial bed. The weaker one became, no more a desired unfingered girl, but a daily habit, a slatternly nitwit, a nervous mother instead of a yielding lover, a dumpy old thing no more attractive than a rickety barn. The girl once wooed and won was dead, no doubt of that. One could not get away from a wife: and the man avoided looking into the mirror, and seeing what a paunched old graybeard he had become, for all that he was better preserved and livelier than his spouse. But one could, with Poe, fantasy the beloved one cold in her grave, and accept as a providential curse this whining lecturing bedmate that hell had wished on him.

All well enough for Longfellow to call a maiden a smile of God: a wife was more like a frown of hell.

The popular songs were all in the frail mood. There was the adopted *The Gipsy's Warning:*

Lady, once there lived a maiden,
Pure and bright, and, like thee, fair,
But he wooed, and wooed, and won her,
Filled her gentle heart with care;
Then he heeded not her weeping,
Nor cared he her life to save.
Soon she perished, now she's sleeping
In the cold and silent grave.

A Married Woman's Lament showed the reverse of this picture:

Before I was married, 'twas nothing but love,
'Twas, Oh my ducky darling, my sweet honey dove,
But now I am married, it's quite a different thing,
Get up and get the breakfast, you darn lazy thing.

From this period dates the great American folksong, *Frankie and Johnnie*, frankly dating from the red light regions of the river towns, perhaps from St. Louis:

Frankie lived down in a cribhouse, cribhouse with only two doors,
Gave all her money to Johnnie, he spent it on those parlor-girls,
He was her man, and he done her wrong!

When she catches her man fingering Nelly Bly, she gets a forty-four,

Root-toot-toot, three times she shot, right through that hard-wood door. . . .

"Bring out your rubber-tired hearses, bring out your rubber-tired hack,
They're taking poor Johnnie to the graveyard, and they ain't a-goin' to bring him back,
He was her man, and he done her wrong!"

With the moralistic ending,

Frankie now sits in the jailyard, underneath a big electric fan,
Says to the women around her, "Beware of a goddamn man,
He'll do you wrong, every time he can!"

The ribald heart of the American people took this song and kept it green. The more gentilified parlor folk sang an acclimatized sobsong by Charlotte Alington Barnard, who wrote as "Claribel":

Take back the heart that thou gavest,
What is my anguish to thee?
Take back the freedom thou cravest,
Leaving the fetters to me. . . .
Drink deep of life's fond illusion,
Gaze on the stormcloud and flee,
Swiftly thro' strife and confusion,
Leaving the burden to me.

The second stanza permits the faithless lover to return, "Once more my darling to be." Vigor in the saloon song; diluted romantic tears in the parlor.

Adah Menken was at least as passionate a lover as Frances Osgood:

When I am a flower—a wild, sweet flower—I will open my glad blue eyes to one alone.
I will bloom in his footsteps, and muffle their echoes with my velvet lips.

She was no Puritan:

Clinging and clasping white hands;
Mingling of soft tresses;
Murmurings of love, and murmurings of life,
With the warm blood leaping up in joy to answer its music;
The broad shelter of arms wherein dwelt peace and content, so sweet to love.

Her *Judith* indicated that she could be a vampire, in the dictionary sense.

It took Walt Whitman to indicate what love might be, and was slowly becoming:

The Female equally with the Male I sing. . . .
I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man.

Walt was the reverse of reticent:

And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me, for I
am determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice to
prove you illustrious. . . .
Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

He left little out:

The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter abandon-
ment. . . .
The furious storm through me careering, I passionately trem-
bling. . . .
What is all else to us? only that we enjoy each other and ex-
haust each other if it must be so. . . .
Love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching.

There is also *A Woman Waits for Me*, and many more. His *Calamus* laurelled a more adolescent type of passion:

Or else, only by stealth, in some wood, for trial, . . .
Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,
With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss, or the new husband's
kiss,
For I am the new husband, and I am the comrade. . . .
Not these—O none of these, more than the flames of me, con-
suming, burning for his love whom I love! . . .
Here I shade down and hide my thoughts.

It is no wonder that the vigorous old singer was derided by Puritanic America as a lecherous old man. America had not yet learned to face passion realistically.

iii.

William Gilmore Simms, a prolific South Carolina novelist and versifier, wrote at great length:

Blessings on the blessing children, sweetest gifts of Heaven to
earth,
Filling all the heart with gladness, filling all the house with
mirth,

Longfellow had his *The Children's Hour.*

But these were voices crying in the wilderness, compared to the lutanists of love of country. George W. Bethune, a New York clergyman, in his *Fourth of July* uttered the national attitude:

God keep the fairest, noblest land that lies beneath the sun,
"Our country, our whole country, and our country ever one!"

Joseph Rodman Drake, in *The American Flag,* wrote with enduring fire:

Flag of the free, heart's hope and home!
By angel hands to valor given;
Thy stars have lit the welkin dome,
And all thy hues were born in heaven.
Forever float that standard sheet!
Where breathes the foe but falls before us,
With Freedom's soil beneath our feet,
And Freedom's banner streaming o'er us!

His friend Halleck set the land on fire with *Marco Bozzaris,* that apostrophe to a Greek martyr for liberty:

For thou art Freedom's now, and Fame's,
One of the few, the immortal names
That were not born to die.

Another poem, with a similar motif, *Arnold Winkelreid,* was as popular.

Holmes, a forthright poet when the mood struck him, voiced a nation's indignation against the proposal to destroy historic *Old Ironsides:*

Ay, tear her tatter'd ensign down!
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle-shout,
And burst the cannon's roar;
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more!

The ship is still being used to awaken patriotism. Longfellow woke the people with remembered *Paul Revere's Ride;* he inspired them with the end of *The Building of the Ship:*

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate! . . .
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee,—are all with thee!

He was not so heeded, for all his popularity, in the pacifistic strain of *The Arsenal at Springfield:*

Were half the power, that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth, bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals and forts:

The warrior's name would be a name abhorred;
And every nation, that should lift again
Its hand against a brother, on its forehead
Would wear forevermore the curse of Cain!

Before the Civil War impended, James Russell Lowell spoke similarly:

Ez fer war, I call it murder,—
 There you hev it plain an' flat;
I don't want to go no furder
 Than my Testyment fer that;
God hez sed so plump an' fairly,
 It's ez long ez it is broad,
An' you've gut to git up airly
 Ef you want to take in God. . . .
Ef you take a sword an' dror it,
 An' go stick a feller thru,
Guv'ment ain't to answer for it,
 God'll send the bill to you.

He broke into an altered eloquence, as the nation's mood altered:

New times demand new measures and new men;
The world advances, and in time outgrows
The laws that in our fathers' days were best; . . .
The time is ripe, and rotten ripe, for change;
Then let it come; I have no dread of what
Is called for by the instinct of mankind,
Nor think I that God's work would fall apart
Because we tear a parchment more or less.

A scrap of parchment. . . .

And then the slavery question became so all-absorbing, that those pacifistic strains became treason. Thus morality alters to its night-twin, as man's time moves on. George P. Morris phrased the Northern attitude:

The Union—right or wrong—inspired
 The burden of our song;
It was the glory of our sires—
 The Union—right or wrong!

There was a bandwagon, and everybody piled aboard. Here is sober old Bryant, who ought to know better, shouting:

See—from a thousand coverts, see
Spring the armed foes that haunt her track;
They rush to smite her down, and we
Must beat the banded traitors back.

An anonymous voice from Louisville gives *A Call to the Brave:*

Shall they, beneath a grinding heel,
Tread down our brave and noble men?
Shall they, with despot's iron rule,
Make of our land a demon's den?

There is talk in this, too, of traitors. Rev. F. W. Hedge indicts:

Our country is calling, our country that bleeds
With daggers that Treason has planted.

John G. Nicolay pictures the Southerners "as demons at revelry in a fiendish rout." William Wetmore Story roars out:

Hark to the signal!—the music of wars
Sounding for tyrants and traitors their doom.

Thomas Buchanan Reed adds his picayune's worth:

Spite of the sword or assassin's stiletto,
While throbs a heart in the breast of the brave,
The oak of the North or the Southern palmetto
Shall shelter no foe except in the grave!

Holmes blares forth:

Down with the leaguing liars, the traitors to their trust,
Who trampled the fair charter of Freedom in dust!

Gentle Alice Cary speaks of the rebels as "ribald rabble white men." Julia Ward Howe sings in more exalted strain:

I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps!
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I have read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on. . . .

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

This was the North's word. The banded traitors, despots, demons, fiends, tyrants, assassins, leaguing liars, and ribald rabble—as they were called—had their word, too.

The North had been set on fire by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and by Hinton Rowan Helper's soberer *The Impending Crisis*. In 1867 this North Carolina poor white issued a "pendent" to the last mentioned book; and his anti-slavery attitude, so denounced in the South, appears in its reality from his own preface, stating that the purpose of this sequel, *Nojoque*, was:

> to write the Negro out of America, and that the secondary object is to write him (and manifold millions of other blacks and bi-colored caitiffs, little better than himself) out of existence, God's simple truth would be told.

His next book was even more anti-Negro.

Mrs. C. C. Dannelly, a graduate of Madison, Georgia, Female College, wrote on *The Confederate Dead:*

Who fought not through a selfish love of gain,
Spurned rank or "bounty," and shrank not from pain;
'Twas but to save wife, children, home, and pride,
The Southern soldier battled, bled, and died.

One of the popular Confederate campsongs was *Stonewall Jackson's Way;* progressing from a picture of the general's praying before the battle, to—

The sun's bright glances rout the mists
Of morning—and, by George!
Here's Longstreet struggling in the lists,
Hemmed in an ugly gorge.
Pope and his Yankees, whipped before,
"Bayonets and grape!" hear Stonewall roar.
"Charge, Stuart! pay off Ashby's score,
In Stonewall Jackson's way!"

Captain W. Gordon McCabe, of Virginia, dreamed in the trenches of his beloved:

Well, whether I ever march home again,
To offer my love and a stainless name
Or whether I die at the head of my men,
I'll be true to the end, all the same.

George H. Miles of Maryland had no doubt as to which side God had enlisted on:

Let the proud spoiler know
God's on our side.

James Ryder Randall, from the same state, lifted the liveliest warsong of all:

Hark to an exiled son's appeal,
Maryland!
My Mother State, to thee I kneel,
Maryland!
For life and death, for woe and weal,
Thy peerless chivalry reveal,
And gird thy beauteous limbs with steel,
Maryland, my Maryland!

S. Teackle Wallis, another son of the terrapin state, grew a bit heated in *The Guerilla* about Northern methods of warfare:

They are turning the slaves upon us,
And with more than the fiend's worse art,
Have uncovered the fires of the savage
That slept in his untaught heart.

They "madden him in their madness to be almost as brutal as they." Henry Timrod sang the appeal to his state:

Call all thy children of the hill,
Wake swamp and river, coast and rill,
Rouse all thy strength and all thy skill,
Carolina!

Francis Orrery Ticknor summoned out *Virginians of the Valley*, whom he described as the knightliest of knights who have kept the lamp of chivalry alight.

The war ended. Father Abram Joseph Ryan, a Virginian who made the whole South his home, extolled *The Sword of Lee*, shrouded now in its sheath, without a stain; and again he spoke:

Furl that banner, for 'tis weary;
Round its staff 'tis drooping dreary;
Furl it, fold it, it is best;
For there's not a man to wave it,
And there's not a sword to save it,
And there's not one left to lave it
In the blood which heroes gave it;
And its foes now scorn and brave it;
Furl it, hide it—let it rest!

We would expect Walt Whitman to sing the war more aloofly than the partisans; and this is what he does.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;

Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now
with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound your drums—so shrill you bugles blow. . . .

Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer, . . .
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,
So strong you thump, O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.

And, in the end, his *Reconciliation:*

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost.

And there is Emerson's broadening vision:

All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.

The land grows older. . . .

iv.

Whitman was too busy, and too crude, to hymn beauty. He could rawly command the poets of his land:

Come, Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Aeneas,' Odysseus' wanderings,
Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,

Repeat at Jerusalem, . . . The same on the walls of your German, French, and Spanish castles. . . .
For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.

What acid truetalk he could utter, against the stony ears of the poetlings of his land!

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,
America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive it or conceal from it, it is impassive enough,
Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them. . . .
He masters whose spirit masters, he tastes sweetest who results sweetest in the long run,
The blood of the brawn beloved of time is unconstraint.

There is more truth in this line than in the average library. Emerson hymned beauty directly:

> For Nature beats in perfect tune,
> And rounds with rhyme her every rune.
> Whether she works in land or sea
> Or hide underground her alchemy.
> Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
> Or dip thy paddle in the lake,
> But it carves the bow of beauty there,
> And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake.

v.

George P. Morris immortalized *My Mother's Bible:*

> Thou truest friend man ever knew,
> Thy constancy I've tried;

When all were false I found thee true,
My counsellor and guide.
The mines of earth no treasures give
That could this volume buy;
In teaching me the way to live,
It taught me how to die.

This rings in all the good old "just plain folks" emotional appeals: mother, the family tree, the Bible, dying; no wonder it became almost as well known as the book which inspired it.

William Crowell, first rector of the Church of the Advent in Boston, who squabbled with his bishop over minor ecclesiastical matters in a thoroughly modern manner, and who was stricken while preaching and died, wrote elegantly of his ordination into the ministry:

O Thou, who in Thy holy place
Hast set Thine orders three,
Grant me, Thy meanest servant, grace
To win a good degree,

that God may be thereby honored, and the Church edified. Bryant turned from this formalism to an identification of God with the intelligence that guided the waterfowl:

He, who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright,

Richard Henry Dana had even the moss pray to God, concerning the poet:

O, may I live, and when he dies
Be at his feet an humble sod;
O, may I lay me where he lies,
To die when he awakes in God.

This seems a bit ambitious for the moss.

Henry Ware, Jr., in *To the Ursa Major,* wrote the more sophisticated faith; addressing the constellation of the Great Bear, and receiving in reply nothing but "everlasting light And everlasting silence."

> Yet the eye
> May read and understand. That hand of God
> Has written legibly what man may know,
> The Glory of the Maker. There it shines,
> Ineffable, unchangeable; and man,
> Bound to the surface of this pigmy globe,
> May ask and know no more.

Astronomers have read more there. H. W. Rockwell has a new note:

> God . . . sows death in the red simoon,
> And cities shrink aghast;
> He speaks! and mist-wrapt pestilence,
> In horrid gloom, moves past.

The old Puritan vigor, but with no suggestion that simoon and pestilence come as punishment for sin. God moves in a mysterious way his destruction to perform. . . . No idea of God as love here: He looks, He withers.

Willis Gaylord Clark, in *Stanzas,* poorly rewrites Job's majesty:

> Can Man waken the Spring with her festal wreath?
> Can the sun grow dim by his lightest breath?
> Will he come again, when death's vale is trod?
> Who then shall dare murmur "There is no God!"

As logic, this is a bit obscure. And there was Sin, as James Gates Percival attested in his *Prometheus:*

How awful is that hour, when conscience stings
The hoary wretch, who on his deathbed hears,
Deep in his soul, the thundering voice that rings,
In one dark, damning moment, crimes of years,
And screaming like a vulture in his ears,
Tells one by one his thoughts and deeds of shame; . . .
And like the torture's wrack the wrestling of his frame.

We have here the germ of the later horrendous myths of the deathbeds of atheists, of Catholics, of anti-prohibitionists, or anybody disapproved of.

Joseph Rodman Drake went further back for his gentle religion, as *The Culprit Fay* evidences. He went back to the pre-Christian, pre-Yahvistic days of the fairies—the little people of the Celts. At the hour of midnight, the fays assemble:

Some on the backs of beetles fly
From the silver tops of the moon-touched trees,
Where they swung in their cobweb hammocks high
And rock'd about in the evening breeze; . . .
Some had lain in the scoop of the rock,
With glittering ising-stars inlaid;
And some had open'd the four-o'clock,
And stole within its purple shade.

The sinful fairy is indicted of love for a mortal maid; but, since she was spotless, his punishment is light: to catch a drop of water from the arc flung by a leaping sturgeon; and to reillumine his fairy lamp from a shooting-star. These accomplished,

Ouphe and Goblin! Imp and Sprite!
Elf of eve! and starry Fay!
Ye that love the moon's soft light,
Hither-thither wend your way;
Twine ye in a jocund ring,
Sing and trip it merrily,
Hand to hand, and wing to wing,
Round the wild witch-hazel tree.

All quietly lovely. Not quite a religion with him: merely the sunset afterglow of a religion, the pleasant sport with the remains of what had once been a devout faith. As new styles of belief supplant the old, these survive for a brief glowing hour as gently fading clouds against a darkening sky.

The technique of Christian salvation appears from Caroline M. Sawyer's *Spurn Not the Guilty*, where, in place of heaping wrathful threats on the sinner,

> Go kindly to him—take his hand
> With gentlest words within thy own,
> And by his side a brother stand
> Till all the demons thou dethrone,

to earn mercy for yourself. All this thee-ing and thou-ing is very ungrammatical, if we must be strict; but it satisfied the poet.

Eliza Townsend, a Bostonian, uttered some polysyllables upon *The Incomprehensibility of God:*

> Where art Thou?—Thou! Source and Support of all
> That is seen, or felt; Thyself unseen,
> Unfelt, unknown,—alas, unknowable!

God is becoming Spencerianly tenuous. She rejects Old Testament stories:

> I ask Thee from the past; . . . did they behold Thee?
> And next interrogate futurity . . . but both are mute.

In this marked absence, the poet says,

> Learn hence, instead,
> To temper highest hope with humbleness,

leaving the deity still entirely unknown and unknowable. A precursor of theosophic dilutions of orthodox religion. . . . Charlotte Cushman, the actress, denies "There is no God" with Nature's beauties:

Blind to thyself, behold Him, Man, in these!

We would expect Emerson to side with Miss Townsend, to go beyond her:

And what if Trade sow cities
Like shells along the shore,
And thatch with towns the prairie broad,
With railways iron'd o'er?
They are but sailing foam-bells
Along Thought's causing stream,
And take their shape and sun-color
From him that sends the dream. . . .

He serveth the servant,
The brave he loves amain;
He kills the cripple and the sick,
And straight begins again.
For gods delight in gods,
And thrust the weak aside;
To him who scorns their charities
Their arms fly open wide.

A mature, a sophisticated voice at last. It is so that life functions, in the main.

Longfellow was all on the other siding, even putting into the lips of Gitche Manito, an alleged Indian god, acceptable Christian tenets:

I will send a Prophet to you,
A Deliverer of the nations, . . .
Break the red stone from this quarry,
Mould and make it into Peace-Pipes. . . .
And as brothers live henceforward!

and in Hiawatha's lips:

I have seen it in a vision,
Seen the great canoe with pinions,

Seen the people with white faces, . . .
Gitche Manito, the Mighty, . . .
Sends them hither on this errand,
Sends them to us with his message—

a message largely of rum and bullets, as we have observed. This is good white wish material, but omits taking into account the Indians it is written about.

The Rev. Charles W. Denison, Chaplain U. S. A., enlivened the Civil War verse by apostrophizing one of the commonest Christian wartime legends, in *The Bible and the Shell*, where both a great gun's shell and a Minie ball were deflected from the soldier's heart by a Bible:

Again this living truth was graved
On that torn and living sod,—
Full many a soldier's life is saved
By the Holy Book of God.

Of course, God fought on the Union side,—

Our Union, ordained by Jehovah,—
Man sets not the fiat aside!

Alfred B. Street broadcasting; and also on the Confederate, as in the words of George H. Miles already quoted.

Lowell, first of the unimpressive poets of that name, in *The Vision of Sir Launfal* was highly orthodox:

Not only around our infancy
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot
We Sinais climb and know it not!

Holmes, in his perfecting of the popular nautilus theme, uttered noble music:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the sweet seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

Walt Whitman was more forthright than Emerson, in his revision of morality and sins:

I say there is in fact no evil. . . .
This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away.

The soul at first he saw tangibly:

Was somebody asking to see the soul?
See, your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands. . . .
Of your real body and any man's or woman's real body,
Item for item it will elude the hands of the corpse-cleaners and pass to fitting spheres,
Carrying what has accrued to it from the moment of birth to the moment of death. . . .
Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul.

There we have a new note: a hint of the onrushing theme of vegetable immortality; the body identified as the soul. Man is the religion-maker:

We consider bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine,
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,

It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth,
than they are shed out of you.

The god-maker, man. . . .

Toward the end, he looked vaguely outward, having arrived at a paralyzed Nebo, with mists before him that hope could hardly pierce:

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,—seeking the spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need be formed—till the ductile anchor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my Soul.

Too vague, too advanced, all this, for America's collective dreaming at that hour. A simpler song—Phoebe Cary's—was nearer the heart's heaven:

One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er;
I am nearer home today
Than I ever was before.

Nearer my Father's house,
Where the many mansions be;
Nearer the great white throne,
Nearer the crystal sea.

Nearer the bound of life,
Where we lay our burdens down,
Nearer leaving the cross,
Nearer gaining the crown.

Yes, that is the good old-fashioned doctrine: life is all unhappiness, all a cross—life should be so; death only, with its immor-

tality, brings the crown. Let sociologists call this a poison to human endeavor: it is what man's life-baffled spirit hungers for. . . .

Oh, if my mortal feet
 Have almost gained the brink;
If it be I am nearer home
 Even today than I think;

Father, perfect my trust;
 Let my spirit feel in death
That her feet are firmly set
 On the rock of a living faith!

A faith is about as much like a rock as a thirst is like a drink. But we find what we seek: mirages like pools, and faiths like rocks.

vi.

Nor has intellectual curiosity matured. Elizabeth Bogart could sing the age's plaint:

I'm weary with thinking! I'm weary and sad
 With the dark thoughts that throng on the mind! Oh, that now
From the garden where long since they flourished, I had
 A chaplet of poppies, to bind on my brow!

And poppies brought sleep. Poe looked on science with a weary eye:

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
 Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes,
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
 Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
 Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
 Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?

Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

It is true that science drives the gods away forever; but its lore is the reverse of dull realities, to the seeing eye cast forward, and not futilely backward. Yet, Poe, because of his soul's sickness, knew even the breakdown of mind: his sister had been lost to him by this, and his stories and poems indicate that he saw himself in *The Haunted Palace,* with its singing opening describing the palace in the monarch Thought's dominion. And then the bitter end:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate.
(Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed,
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers, now, within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms, that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out forever
And laugh—but smile no more.

It takes a steady brain to pierce illusions, and think.

vii.

George P. Morris, author of *My Mother's Bible,* impressed with *Woodman, Spare That Tree:*

Woodman, spare that tree!
Touch not a single bough!
In youth it sheltered me,
And I'll protect it now.
'Twas my forefather's hand
That placed it near his cot; . .
There, woodman, let it stand,
Thy axe shall harm it not! . . .

When but an idle boy
I sought its grateful shade;
In all their gushing joy
Here too my sisters played.
My mother kissed me here;
My father pressed my hand—
Forgive this foolish tear,
But let that old oak stand!

Where nostalgia—homesickness—the longing for the things of youth—assumes such a helpful mood, we can only applaud the fact that the singer sang it so strenuously, and the land took it to its heart; although the lumbering industry still prospered.

John K. Mitchell phrased a common opinion:

A new song should be sweetly sung,
For memory gilds it not;
It brings not back the strains that rung
Through childhood's sunny cot. . . .
Oh, the old song—the old song!
The song of the days of glee,
The new song may be better sung,
But the good old song for me!

Grenville Mellen woke ten stanzas to the same refrain:

Shout like those godlike men of old,
Who daring storm and foe
On this blest soil their anthem rolled
Two hundred years ago!

This was as crude as the *American Taxation* ballad; to the extreme contrary, Halleck lifted a song as lovely as the best of Tom Moore:

There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
And the nightingale sings round it all the night long;
In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet dream
To sit in the roses and hear the bird's song.
That bower and its music I never forgot;
But oft, when alone, in the bloom of the year,
I think, is the nightingale singing there yet?
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer?

Bryant's *Thanatopsis* is primarily a song for a return to childhood's home of nature, for all its overcast at the end of death. His *Forest Hymn* advocates that men mould their lives upon an imitation of forest trees; which might produce human roots, but hardly acorns. His *The Hunter of the Prairies* is another phrasing of the longing to return; in skies unstained by village smoke, and wastes untouched by the plough—

Here, with my rifle and my steed,
And her who left the world for me,
I plant me, where the red deer feed
In the green desert—and am free.

Charles Fenno Hoffman sang the virtues of woodland solitude quite as zestfully. William D. Gallagher was one of many who enlaurelled *Our Early Days:*

Our early days!—how often back
We turn on life's bewildering track,
To where, o'er hill and valley, plays
The sunlight of our early days!

Lydia Jane Pierson begged anyone, "Oh, show me a place like the wildwood home"; Whittier sang delightfully of *The Barefoot Boy:*

From my heart I give thee joy,—
I was once a barefoot boy! . . .
Oh for childhood's painless play,
Sleep that wakes in laughing day,

and all the remembered rest of it.

Longfellow, in *The Day Is Done,* uttered the folk-plea for heart-throb songs, instead of high poetry:

Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer.

Then there is tribute to the town by the sea, in which "My youth comes back to me," with its refrain, "A boy's will is the wind's will, And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Even Whitman took out his homesickness by calling all away from the cities to the open road:

Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

The grave, as Longfellow said in *A Psalm of Life,* is not life's goal:

"Dust thou art, to dust returnest,"
Was not spoken of the soul.

Emerson drew a different moral:

'Twill soon be dark;
Up! mind thine own aim, and
God speed the mark!

As a rule, however, the poets welcomed even disease, as a means of arriving at death. Thus Percival, in the astounding *Consumption:*

There is a sweetness in woman's decay,
When the light of beauty is fading away. . . .
When all that was bright and fair was fled,
But the loveliness lingering round the dead.

About time for the mind's activity, and a little therapeutic activity. Robert M. Charlton, a Georgian, awoke a kindred thrill in thousands when he gloated,

They are passing away, they are passing away—
The joy from our hearts, and the light from our day.

Samuel H. Dickson, a South Carolinian, made no bones about his desire:

I seek the quiet of the tomb,
There would I sleep;
I love its silence and its gloom
So dark and deep.

He insisted upon lying in the grave alone; evidently disapproving of the East Indian suttee system, where a convention accompanied the dead.

Benjamin B. Thatcher established that Maine was not behind the South in its welcome to death:

Bury me by the ocean's side—
Oh! give me a grave on the verge of the deep,
Where the noble tide. . . .
Shall . . . bathe my cold bosom in death as I sleep!

Henry W. Parker indited a long tribute to *The City of the Dead*, whose inhabitants "ever come, and never go." Albert G. Green, a Rhode Islander, in *The Baron's Last Banquet*, had old Baron Rudiger challenge death, and die midway of uttering the defiance. Holmes sang of *The Last Leaf*, tending toward death. Park Benjamin wrote the most grotesquely bumpety of all elegies:

> The departed! the departed!
> They visit us in dreams,
> And they glide above our memories
> Like shadows over streams;
> But where the cheerful lights of home
> In constant lustre burn,
> The departed, the departed
> Can never more return!

Incredible as it may sound, this was a much reprinted favorite poem in the pensive forties.

Willis G. Clark wrote on *Euthanasia*, or easy death. The adored Frances Osgood, in *Euridyce*, died with a lot of agony:

> Oh! lost, for ever lost! undone! unblest!
> I faint, I die!—the serpent's fang once more
> Is here!—nay, grieve not thus! Life, but not Love, is o'er!

This held, until Amy Lowell's time, the standard-broad-exclamation-point record. Elizabeth S. Smith chanted death, and reunion in heaven. Emily Judson objected to death, like an earlier Edna St. Vincent Millay: "Oh, do not let me die," commencing her next poem, however, "Ay, let me die." Poets are inconstant ever. . . .

Thomas J. Charlton's lugubrious *'Tis the Voice of the Gale* is already dead, but for its resurrection in Lewis Carroll's *'Tis the Voice of the Lobster*. Emerson, so often admirable, faced death with level gaze:

> As the bird trims her to the gale,
> I trim myself to the storm of time,
> I man the rudder, reef the sail,
> Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime.

Poe was more death-obsessed than any. Of the *Spirits of the Dead* he wrote,

> The spirits of the dead who stood
> In life before thee are again
> In death around thee—and their will
> Shall overshadow thee.

His loves were, as a rule, dead loves; *The City in the Sea* is a magnificent tribute to death, at the peak of the poet's singing:

> There shrines and palaces and towers
> (Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
> Resemble nothing that is ours.
> Around, by lifting winds forgot,
> Resignedly beneath the sky
> The melancholy waters lie. . . .
>
> The waves have now a redder glow—
> The hours are breathing faint and low—
> And when, amid no earthly moans,
> Down, down that town shall settle hence,
> Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
> Shall do it reverence.

Greatest of all is his *The Conqueror Worm*, with its high conclusion:

> Out—out are the lights—out all!
> And, over each quivering form,
> The curtain, a funeral pall,
> Comes down with the rush of a storm.
> And the angels, all pallid and wan,
> Uprising, unveiling, affirm
> That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
> And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

Sung with a strange ecstasy, that other hearts do not fail to thrill to.

Longfellow's *The Wreck of the Hesperus* owed much of its charm to the picturing of death, both of the skipper and his daughter. *Evangeline* ends on the note of the death of Gabriel, the girl's lover. The Civil War poetry rang with the note:

All quiet along the Potomac tonight,
No sound save the rush of the river;
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead—
The picket's off duty forever.

So with Francis Miles Finch's:

By the flow of the inland river,
Whence the fleets of iron have fled,
Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,
Asleep are the ranks of the dead:—
Under the sod and the dew,
Waiting the Judgment Day:—
Under the one, the Blue;
Under the other, the Gray.

Henry Timrod's *At Magnolia Cemetery* is a lovely elegy:

In seeds of laurel in the earth
The blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
The shaft is in the stone!

There is Theodore O'Hara's resonant *The Bivouac of the Dead:*

On Fame's eternal camping-ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And Glory guards, with solemn round,
The bivouac of the dead.

Stephen Collins Foster, a Pittsburgh Irishman who had come from Virginia, self-taught composer and lyricist, who did not outlive the Civil War, became the people's laureate because he dealt so universally with the return theme:

Farewell forever to old Tennessee,
Farewell, my Lily dear, don't weep for me.

We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,
For the old Kentucky home, far away.

Oh, darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home.

Out of this simple return to childhood and the old home, he sang more constantly the return to early lifelessness or death:

No more work for poor Old Ned,
He's gone whar de good niggers go.

All de darkies am a-weeping,
Massa's in de cold, cold ground.

Nelly was a lady, last night she died,
Toll de bell for lubly Nell, my dark Virginny bride.

Oh! boys, carry me 'long, carry me till I die;
Carry me down to de buryin' groun', massa, don't you cry.

I'm coming, I'm coming, for my head is bending low;
I hear those gentle voices calling, "Old Black Joe."

Fair, fair, with golden hair,
Under the willow she's sleeping.

Not hard, out of the embracing popularity of all this, to diagnose man's chief desire. Alice Cary sang invitingly, to *Death's Ferryman:*

Boatman, thrice I've called thee over.

There was Thomas Dunn English's *Ben Bolt:*

In the old churchyard in the valley, Ben Bolt,
In a corner obscure and alone,

They have fitted a slab of the granite so gray,
And Alice lies under the stone!

with its constant parodies, including the one closing—

She was hit on the block by an eighty ton rock,
And Sweet Alice lies under the stone.

. . . The anonymous *Lorena*, the song most popular among the Confederate soldiers, was hardly cheerful:

Our hearts will soon lie low, Lorena,
Life's tide is ebbing out so fast.

Lincoln's favorite poem—and the favorite of many Americans—was William Knox's *Mortality*, a Scotch product ending:

'Tis a wink of an eye, 'Tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud—
O why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

Walt Whitman is, by common acclaim, ranked as America's greatest poet. He is not the most beloved poet: moralistic Longfellow, prosy Walt Mason or cheery Eddie Guest probably qualifies there; but Whitman earns the critical acclaim, and is the shaping force in today's poetry. His word on death was definite:

I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death.

Themed on death is his most popular poem, *O Captain, My Captain*. Lincoln's death stirred the poet profoundly. *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* is one of the great elegies of the language:

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land, . . .

With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads.

There is the interset lyric:

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later, delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious;
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them, I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O death.

Perhaps even greater is his *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, with the carol of the bird to his dead mate, and the finale:

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere) . . .
A word then (for I will conquer it),
The word final, superior to all. . . .

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death, death.

England had her "To be or not to be," her "Out, out, brief candle," her "Put out the light, and then put out thy light," her *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*,

In Memoriam, The Garden of Proserpine, Crossing the Bar, and many more: to match them, as our favorite poems, we have this trilogy of Whitman's, much of Poe, and the death-songs of today, that will be reached soon enough. Man's dominant desire. . . .

There was little real cry of the body for a better environment in the Civil War decades. The very poor lacked daily bread; but labor, as a rule, was painted in rosy colors. Life was commercial now, and romantic no longer; things were no better than in Elizabeth's romantic hour.

One cause only lit the soul of man: the North's objection to Southern Negro slavery. The temporizer received the North's fiercest condemnation. Meanwhile, the mechanical age was coming in. Most of all, the egotistic Walt Whitman lifted his song, shattering all or most of the accepted conventions.

Love was single-standarded. The frail sex expected to be won, seduced, neglected, left to die. The respectable lady was never assailed; prompt second marriages were dreadfully immoral; and woman was beginning to admit that she liked love as much as man. Poe wished his love dead; and men accepted the picture, as of the disappearance of their romantic sweetheart, baked into a harsh wife in the oven glare of matrimony. And the ordinary people had their crib-houses.

Walt Whitman appeared, singing frank love of women and men as well.

Patriotism woke the land. Pacifism was hushed in the oncoming of the Civil War. The Southerners were traitors, demons, despots, tyrants, assassins, liars, and a ribald rabble; the Northerners were spoilers, madmen, despots, and worse. Then reconciliation came. . . .

Beauty was silent, but for Emerson. But Whitman began to teach the poets what to write about.

Religion started with the extollation of one's mother's Bible, and widened to an unknown and unknowable god. The fairies were still alive; and gods, with Emerson and others, became

almost Nature. Longfellow swung the scales backward, and Whitman forward. Stalemate. . . .

Thinking made people weary; science stole away the gods; madness threatened. . . .

Youth and youth's pleasures were golden; disease was to be thanked, as a means to death; and death was the goal of every man's desire. Poe sang this, Whitman sang it clearest of all.

Man's wishes had not altered greatly since Shakespeare's hour.

But they had altered.



A CELESTIAL DIGRESSION

"Seared by these punishing whips, art flings his iridescent glamor over dumb things."

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V

A CELESTIAL DIGRESSION

A FEW moments in the laboratory, now, to make sure that we are on the right track.

The first problem is, are poems exclusively unique and individual things; or do they spring out of group needs and demands, so that the personality, the soul, the dreams, the desired heaven, of the group, may be read from the individual's poems?

One thing is clear: if the group ratifies and accepts the poems as its own expression, we can read the group heaven thus. Take the Christian idea of heaven: or, to limit it more, the idea of heaven of any Christian sect. This composite idea came to some individual first, as a matter of divine inspiration, according to the claim. Or to several successive individuals: for instance, if we deal with Methodism, the heaven came successively to certain of the major prophets; to Daniel; to Jesus; to John; to Paul; to certain Catholic fathers; to Luther and other Protestants; to the Wesleys. It did not come to the living members of the sect: they received their idea of heaven from these "inspired" men of the past. All group heavens come to certain individuals first; and, by group ratification, become the collective desires of the group.

The same thing applies to the heaven revealed by poetry. Some individual colonist or colonists first dreamed of independence from England. He did not invent this thought: it was ground out of him, a sensitive personality, by some oppression of England. The same force worked more tardily on other colonists. He phrased it first. Soon others said it. Soon a majority, or at least an effective minority, accepted it as their heaven-wish. Then came the Declaration of Independence, Bunker Hill, Saratoga, Yorktown: and the dream, one element of the colonial heaven, had become a reality.

We find the dream appearing early in the poetry of the colo-

nists. We trace its growth through the poetry. We discover its achievement in the pæans of rejoicing at the ultimate victory. Poetry is the clinical thermometer that gives, at every stage, the state of social health of the patient, America.

The dream appeared first to an individual: but the cause was not individual; it was social. England's oppressions, originating too in an individual, and adopted as a group expression of the effective part of the English group, caused the dream to appear, to increase, to be achieved. Some aspect of the environment caused the dream to come: and this weighed on the social group, as well as on the sensitive individual who saw and said it first.

Where group ratification takes place, it is clear that the whole group adopts the dream. But can we take the further step, and say that even the dream has a group origin, though appearing first in one sensitive individual? Do wishes, and their expression as thoughts, spring solely from an individual: or have they a group parentage?

Is not, to word it differently, poetry purely individual? Is not the poet a solitary sensitive, whose song is wholly a flowering of his own soul, untouched by social forces? What right have we to assume that poetry is uttered as the land's dream?

Let us take an individual case, and test the matter. Any poet will do. To freshen the discussion, let us take a poet that neither the reader nor the writer knows much of. Here is Richard Henry Wilde, known as the singer of one song, *Stanzas*, "My life is like a summer rose," praised by Poe, and otherwise largely a blank on the record. What can we ascertain about him?

Of his life, we learn that he was born in Dublin, Ireland, on September 24, 1789, of an ironmonger father who emigrated to Baltimore in 1797, leaving his Dublin business in the hands of a partner. Within a few years this business was wrecked by the partner, through a combination of bad management and an indictment for treason.

In 1800 the sickly boy, whose health was so bad that at first he had not been expected to live from month to month, had to be taken from school, due to his father's business reverses, and put in a store. The father soon died; the impoverished

mother moved to Augusta, Georgia, and started a small general store there, aided by her sickly son. Young Wilde, in spite of this invalidism and the drudgery of his clerking, taught himself bookkeeping, and even familiarized himself with the world's literature, as far as the meagre libraries in Georgia permitted.

The store meant continued poverty; Wilde secretly studied law. He had a speech impediment; so he organized a dramatic club, acted constantly with it, and overcame the impediment. Books were scanty: he raised a fund to establish a public library. At the end of a year and a half's secret study of law, pale, emaciated, feeble, with a consumptive cough, he set out for his bar examinations. He went to a distant court, not telling his plans: so as to spare his mother, if he failed, the shock of learning of his ill success. He was examined strictly, and passed. And he was now eighteen.

His health improved; his self-culture ripened; in a few years, he was made attorney-general of Georgia. In 1815, two weeks older than the minimum age requirement, Wilde was elected to Congress. Twice afterwards he was elected, with intervals of legal work, once for four successive terms. In 1834, in the balloting for speaker, Wilde received 64 electoral votes; Polk, later a president, 42; two opponents, less than forty each. In subsequent balloting, one of the lowest candidates was elected. Wilde fought Jackson's Force Bill, and was denied reëlection. This gave him a chance to go abroad, travel Europe for two years, and live for three in Florence. He wrote a studious life of Tasso, and worked on one of Dante, utilizing in both cases original source materials. He was married, widowed, had two sons, moved to New Orleans to practice law in 1842, held a law professorship at the University of Louisiana, and died of the yellow fever on September 10, 1847.

First of all, this is a typical American story. It would have been different, if it had been placed anywhere else in the world. In Ireland, it would probably have been more turbulent, less pioneering, and with less chance to rise. In England, it would have been more gentilified, with less chance to rise. If Wilde had emigrated to Africa, to India, to Australia, it would have had more pioneering, under different circumstances. It is an

American story: the life itself represents America, overcoming enfeebling difficulties to triumph in the brief end before death came. Look at the handicaps: family poverty, lack of formal education, speech impediment, ill health. Look at these harnessed, and used as goads toward the conquest of industry, law, politics, literature, leisure, position. A typical American story.

Yet, while the drift of the poetry is typical, the details are unique. The background was not shared by every other American; in its entirety, it may not have been shared by any other individual. We should have, from him, unique and individual poetry, if any environment could produce this. Did he write, with his singing Celtic gift and his urge to conquer life, his own word exclusively: or did he phrase the general speech of his age, in dream and theme?

He may have said a few absolutely individual poems, which the land failed to ratify. These do not concern us, in our survey of America's soul. Probably there were none of this type. Let us turn to the seven poems by Wilde in Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America*, and see what these poems say.

Here is the *Ode to Ease*, a pleasant variant on the popular English odes of half a century before. England had much ease, among its upper classes; but even the leisurely Southland had less of it than it desired. "I love thee, Ease, and only thee," Wilde sings: his own life had little of it, and this was a natural longing. It was a nostalgic desire for the ease of childhood; and of the motherland, England. All shared this nostalgic desire.

Here is *Solomon and the Genius*, holding four things:

> that love of woman brings vain joys;
> that ambition for fame and power is merely vanity of vanities;
> that the search for human wisdom is vainest of all; and
> that only heaven can ease man's long thirst.

The first of these restates the Christian, and especially the Puritanic, attitude. It is a socially accepted idea. The second is the thesis of *Macbeth*, and of centuries of English and Ameri-

can verse. The third was found in Pope, Poe, and many more —the dispraise of the human intellect. The fourth is the religious theme of most Christian and Puritan poets. Nothing original here: the ideas contributed to him by the social group, and uttered properly by him as their dreaming.

Here is *Napoleon's Grave:* surely a unique alien theme, picked out by this Irish-born American poet-politician as an ode to another conquerer of life's difficulties. Wilde defends Napoleon, who made mountains into molehills. But the strange thing that is revealed by a survey of the poets of any age, or of any land down the ages, is the pervading sameness of the themes sung by the poets. This poem's theme is not unique. One volume of Mrs. Sigourney's has *The Tomb of Josephine,* defending the lady, and *Napoleon's Epitaph,* praising the Corsican. Emma C. Embury wrote *Stanzas* on the death of Napoleon's son; Prosper M. Wetmore, on *The Banner of Murat;* John Pierpont, on *Napoleon at Rest;* Isaac McLellan, Jr., on *The Death of Napoleon;* Isaac Clason, "hymning his worth"; and there were many others. This was the hour's theme, similar to our recent spilth of verses on Lindbergh, on the airplane, on Armistice Day. Wilde, in *Napoleon's Grave,* only spoke what all were saying.

Here is *A Farewell to America,* written on sailing to Europe. Practically every American poet who has afforded such a voyage has written a variant of the same poem.

Here is *To the Mocking-Bird.* But Albert Pike, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Alexander Beaufort Meek, and many more Southerners wrote to the same winged biped.

Here is a sonnet *To Lord Byron.* Dozens of them were written. Byron and Greece, with its struggle for liberty, were general symbols of the age, even before Halleck's *Marco Bozzaris.*

Lastly, the *Stanzas,* "My life is like a summer rose," are merely a singing restatement of the regular stream of "All is vanity," an expression of the briefness of life, and a tendency toward death.

In other words, no one of these poems expresses a typically

unique wish: all are group wishes, expressed by this poet, as well as by others of his age.

Wilde may have written more individual poems, similar to Mrs. Sigourney's poems to Christian missionaries. But these verses of hers did not push into any of the anthologies: the age might accept Christian missionaries, as it accepted whooping-cough and warts; but it did not visualize its heaven as populated by them. Insofar as Wilde is remembered at all, it is not for any unique word, but as a voice for the age.

We mentioned Wilde as a one-poem poet. Only the exquisite *Stanzas* live today. Why is this?

We no longer thrill to this adulation of ease, as a statement of a mature aim in life—except perhaps the hard-working proletaire, and they do not count much, as yet, in the land's cultural history. The four themes of *Solomon and His Genius* are dead today: love of woman is praised today; ambition is admirable and necessary; human wisdom is our surest guide; heaven is an illusion, and happiness on earth is man's goal. So today holds. This poem is as dead today as Jonah's whale. Again, we are largely uninterested in Napoleon: Lenin, Mussolini, even Rudolph Valentino and Babe Ruth are more important to living man. Fresher things can be said in a *Farewell to America*, especially concerning prohibition. *The Mocking-Bird* is not as important to us as the steam siren or the radio's static. Lord Byron is a dead little pigeon. Except for the *Stanzas* . . . which survive. For we still feel life as too brief, and lean forward toward death, relishing its macabre coming.

The *Stanzas* are still great, for his whole life is summed up in them. Poverty, lack of education, illness, a bitter struggle for every inch he gained, defeat in politics when near the crest, self-imposed exile in Europe, a dull late success in New Orleans: how could the sum of these teach other than the brevity of life, and the dead sea fruitage of its reward?

America today lacks some of this travail, in many cases. We have learned to relish life more. But we still, in a homesick way, thrill to the old word of the *Stanzas*. They are the expression of a group wish. The land has spoken through them. They embody one phase of its heaven, even today.

If poets were as simple as a row of corn stalks in a field, there would be no question but that their activities, their longings, were typical of the group, and not individual. Each corn stalk wants a certain amount of sunshine, of rain, of good soil, a certain freedom from choking competition of weeds and other plant life: each prepares for, whether or not it desires, the pandering activities of the fertilizing agent. And that is approximately all. The first stalk is not a Methodist, the second a vegetarian, the third a theosophist, the fourth an anti-prohibitionist, the fifth a Buddhist, the sixth a financial magnate, and so on.

Yet even here, there may be distinctions. Give the stalk at the end of the row a shallow sandy soil, and it will grow warped and stunted, hungering for good soil more than any of the others. Give another a too-sheltered location under the shade of a tree, and it will thirst for sun more than others. Choke one with docks and thistles, while the rest are weeded, and this one will ache for release from this. These three stalks would share, to some extent, in the uniform group wishes: but their emphasis would all be for the particular thing they needed most. Only insofar as the group shared this need, in lesser vigor, would the group accept the desires of these three as its own.

We picked Wilde blindly, and what we have found out of his poetic product can be assumed, in general, of all poets. Most of the New York and New England singers were definitely in the orthodox pattern. Read the lives of two hundred of them, as I have had to, and you will see how often they come out of a scarcity of early advantages, out of ill-health, and out of some deprivation, like an aborted love romance or the death of a young beloved. Thomson sang:

> Singing is sweet, but be sure of this:
> Lips only sing when they cannot kiss.

If one poet was born without arms, the burden of his song might be a desire for arms; or a boast that he had the strongest arms in the land; or some other phrasing of his desire for normalcy in this direction. But, below that, we would find the

subdued substratum of the general desires. And, if the land could find somehow its own desires for more power symbolized in this poet's cry for arms, it might adopt his song, without cutting off all the arms in the land.

We have poets like the three disfavored stalks of corn, like the armless singer. Poe seems a departure from the norm. Yet his major desires were the same as all: for a mother's love during childhood, for his sister's company, for normal love, for death. His mother died when he was an infant; his sister was separated from him by her insanity; these together warped his love interest into an overlove for mother and sister, so that he thereafter chose his love-types to fit these two patterns: and, since one was dead, and one insane, and since morever love with either of these relatives was forbidden as incest, he sang his love as dead, and he sang insanity.

And every man could take this longing for a dead love, as we have pointed out, as a longing for the vanished romantic sweetheart, swallowed up in the prosaic changeling wife. America, and the world, echoed Poe's song as its own: especially since death, the world's desire, was its overtone.

Whitman seems more of a departure. Yet he was a natural sensitive outgrowth of the artisan class, with its general lack of culture and lack of a desire for culture. Its sense of inferiority, compared with the genteel leaders of America, was exaggerated in him into self-identification with the universe, and a demand for equality for all. He was in advance of his hour, as all extreme sensitives are; he is backward for us today, in many respects. We have outgrown, in the main, the adolescence of his love for men. We are outstripping the frankness of his love for women: for pure physical love is the root, and not the whole, of love. We have gone far beyond his naïve picture of overalled democracy in America: we have grown instead into a Rotary robot majority, and a few sad-hearted overlords who see no way out of their own maze. We still subscribe to his songs to death. Man will never get beyond these.

We must note, in passing, gipsying desires of individual poets, apart from the group desires: such as a zeal for Christian missions, a vegetarian diet or some eccentric passion. But such ex-

pressions speak for a limited group, and at most dictate a small suburb of America's heaven. There are always the wider voices.

Poets are not, at first, aware of the fact that their utterance is the age's utterance and the land's utterance, shared by them with many other living singers. A poet, unless entirely mistaught to "write as Keats and Shelley and Shakespeare wrote," from the start seeks to be original: and believes that he is. When the fury of composition has worn off, and he can critically examine his own product in comparison with familiar contemporary poetry, the appalling discovery grows on him that he has merely restated attitudes of the past, or of some living singer. This may account for the early mortality of the song of so many poets.

We are more and more coming to realize, with the psychologists, that thought is in essence a communal, a social, thing, raining on us from without, and only becoming partially individual as it filters through our individual receiving sets, or brains. Studies of group and mob psychology point the way. Even the most individual desires, such as a hunger for food or for love, spring from our human natures, which are shared by the rest of the group. In a time of famine, when food is wanting for all, this need grows admittedly social. If love were outlawed by law, the hunger for this would grow upon all as a social need. Our common humanness produces the desires, the singing expression of them, the wished-for heaven built thereby.

Ideas are in the air, and individuals—the more sensitive individuals—pluck them from it: the individuals do not create them.

Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace arrived at their concept of the how of evolution, by elimination of the unfit, almost simultaneously. The thing was in the air: if neither of these men had lived and labored in this full field, some other laborer would have made the same discovery at about the same time. If either had been deflected in his studies, or had died too soon, the other would have made the discovery. The needs of the environment drove the idea into men's minds.

Christopher Columbus has the credit for rediscovering Amer-

ica. But his was the age of westward and globe-girdling exploration. If he had never persuaded a sovereign to angel the trip, some one soon would have made it, and America would have been again discovered.

At the time of the Wright brothers, every land had its scientists working on workable heavier-than-air flying machines. If they had failed, some other one would have succeeded first. It was in the air: it had been forecast in America's poetry.

This is true of all scientific discoveries, inventions, philosophies, thoughts, emotions.

Let us deal posthumously with a kindred art, painting, as seen through the eyes of two modern poets. Here is Elinor Wylie singing, in *Castilian:*

> Velasquez took a pliant knife
> And scraped his palette clean;
> He said, "I lead a dog's own life
> Painting a king and queen."
>
> He cleaned his palette with oily rags
> And oakum from Seville wharves;
> "I am sick of painting painted hags
> And bad ambiguous dwarves." . . .
>
> He burnt the rags in the fireplace
> And leaned from the window high;
> He said, "I like that gentleman's face
> Who wears his cap awry."
>
> This is the gentleman, there he stands,
> Castilian, sombre-caped,
> With arrogant eyes, and narrow hands
> Miraculously shaped.

For the genesis of such a poem, it is not difficult to see this poet in rebellion against being required to write, for a livelihood, the trivial trifles that most editors normally think their readers demand. Yet she must cloak this, so that the editors, who are

to buy it, can never suspect that she is crucifying them in the likeness of the patronizing royalty. And so we have *Castilian*, appearing about 1923.

Here is Virginia McCormick, writing in *The Century Magazine* five years later:

> Leonardo wearied of courts and kings
> And of royal favorites too;
> He was bored by Lisa's cryptic smile,
> Whose meaning he never quite knew.
>
> "O, the King of France is all very well,
> But I paint to his taste—not mine;
> My stomach is sick of his fine French food,
> And cloyed with his sweet French wine." . . .
>
> So he fled to a garret in old Milan,
> With a shelf for Verrocchio's bust,
> And he boasted, "I'll paint as a free man can,
> And not as a puppet must."
>
> But the spirit of Louis held him fast,
> And his art made a French grimace,
> For he painted John in the wilderness
> And gave him a satyr's face.

The theme is the same: the artist's objection to being dictated to in his art, his fleeing, his painting as he pleases. The tail of the second poem is incorrect psychologically, as Freud's study of Leonardo established. But both poems say, in identical manner, the same thing: the artist's detestation of continued bootlicking to wealth and power, and a flight from it.

Glance for a moment at the great artists of the Renaissance. They painted chiefly religious themes, madonnas and children, and the like. They were not primarily religious-minded men: they were on fire with pagan Greek art; but the age, and their royal cathedral-building and -improving patrons, demanded these

subjects. Moreover, these patrons stipulated that the madonna as a rule be the moment's court mistress, and the child some right- or left-handed child of the patron. And so the artists, expressing the wish of the period, followed their patrons' demands, the phrased social wish. The art was dominated by the popular wish; it pictured the then conception of heaven.

If an artist insisted on painting his own theme in his own way, he lacked patron support while he did this; he probably could not place or sell the picture; and it probably was destroyed, as out of the hour's demands in art. The demand today is looser: it was strict then.

Ideas, and even art expressions, are in the air, and use minds and artistic natures to clothe themselves to man.

Let us take one or two ideas, and see how the poetic utterance is dictated by the land and the age.

America has only a few national legends: the purity of Washington, the Christ-like personality of Lincoln, the justice of Jesse James, and a few more, complete the tally. Let us take Lincoln, as the poets have uttered him.

Lincoln, liberator, politician, free-thinker, martyred by a mad zealot's bullet, to the great cost of the reconstructed South: how has he been treated? The fact that he was an astute politician is of course ignored: that does not fit into a heroic picture. The fact that he was a free-thinker is denied: that would never fit in. The other two fit in—though he was an unintentional liberator, freeing the slaves as a war measure; and certainly an unintentional martyr.

Bryant hymned his death:

> Thy task is done; the bonds are free;
> We bear thee to an honored grave
> Whose proudest monument shall be
> The broken fetters of the slave.

Walt Whitman took his grief more personally:

Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I with mournful tread
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

This, plus the great elegy with its invocation to death. As might have been expected, Whitman does not sing at all of Lincoln the liberator, although Walt was a zealot in the same cause. By this time, life had established to Whitman that it was not to be kind to him: soon enough he was paralyzed, to linger on into a retrogressive sunset afterglow of old age. He used Lincoln's death only as a vehicle for an ode to death: we may almost disregard this, as a treatment of Lincoln.

Edwin Markham rose to more effective eloquence than usual:

His words were oaks in acorns. . . .
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

His was "a pen that set a people free," in Markham's tribute.

John Gould Fletcher,—born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and now a Northern expatriate—does not bring himself to mention liberation at all. He might be the first to deny that his Southern background dictated this. In any case, he picks out a new idea for his crest,—an idea new so far in these tributes, but already a platitude of Lincoln's birthday orations:

Beam over it, stars,
Wrap it round, stripes—stripes red for pain that he bore for you,
Enfold it forever, O flag, rent, soiled, but repaired through your anguish.

Preserving the union is here made Lincoln's major contribution. North and South are alike grateful today for this; the South, in parts, still resents liberation.

To James Oppenheim,

He knew what Shakespeare never knew,
What Dante never dared to dream—
That Men are one
Beneath the sun,
And before God are equal souls.

This is a more abstract wording of the liberation theme, wrenched out of a shrewd group inferiority feeling. Whitman felt similarly, as a member of a different group.

Edgar Lee Masters pictures Lincoln indirectly through Anne Rutledge, stressing forgiveness, and national justice and truth: more eloquence, this, than truth. Robinson, who sings human failure and the failure of the super-intellect, saw more of the cryptic mystery in Lincoln:

For he, to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth.

Robinson, himself, knew bitterly the "shopman's test of age and worth." This line, to show another parallelism, appears in Robert Frost as:

The trial by market everything must come to.

Frost too failed in that trial: or had his success postponed largely past the time for enjoyment.

Lincoln, the gaunt silent mystery, has become one of the demigods of America: the half-mythical liberator of the slave, the undoubted cementer of the union, forced by political conditions to ratify Whitman's utterance of equality of men; and a symbol for forgiveness. The political conditions are forgotten; the rest remains. So America sees Lincoln: the poets merely ratify this, each in his partial way, and add no new note to the regard in which he is held.

Just after 1900, Langdon Smith's *Evolution* appeared in the New York *Morning Journal*, from which it made its way into the anthologies. Its motif is familiar:

Thus life by life, and love by love,
We passed through the cycles strange,
And breath by breath, and death by death,
We followed the chain of change. . . .

Our trail is on the Kimmeridge clay,
And the scarp of the Purbeck flags,
We have left our bones in the Bagshot stones,
And deep in the coraline crags;

and so down to the lovers of today. In 1905 G. C. Chesterton republished *A Chord of Colour*, containing:

Then knew I why the Fashioner
Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;
And ere 'twas good enough for her,
He tried it on Eternity.

Richard Le Gallienne's *Flos Aevorum*, Flower of the Ages, appeared soon after the 1913 resurgence of American poetry:

Still with his work unsatisfied,
Eager each new effect to try,
The solemn artist cast aside
Rainbow and shell and butterfly . . .

Creation, to make just one girl,
Hath travailed with exceeding fear. . . .

All time hath travailed to this rose.

Louis Untermeyer, in *Challenge*, uttered *How Much of Godhood:*

How much of Godhood did it take—
What purging epochs had to pass,
Ere I was fit for leaf and lake
And worthy of the patient grass? . . .

But oh, what cleansings and what fears,
What countless raisings from the dead,
Ere I could see Her, touched with tears,
Pillow the weary little head.

We could have started this with Whitman's vast evocation of the ages in *Song of Myself*, where he says of his own embryo:

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it substance,

and the Darwinian rest of it. But this was not a love song: it was restricted to the poet himself. Untermeyer begins with this note, and broadens it into the Smith-Chesterton-Le Gallienne note.

Each of these poets, in all probability, imagined he was being entirely original. There is no plagiarism here, in all probability. The theme, with slight variations, is identical: evolution laboring to produce, first the poet, and then the beloved one, as its crown. The theme was in the air; it entered these poets, and spoke through them. This was one of the words of the age.

We might take the theme of vegetable immortality—the resurrection of the individual in grass and flower and tree, fish and beast and bird—as foreshadowed in Miss Millay's *Renascence;* mentioned in Bynner's *The New World*, in Wheelock's *Earth;* expressed in Oppenheim's *We Unborn;* phrased in my *Immortality;* and reappearing constantly. There was the *Rubaiyat* before all these. To multiply cases is unnecessary.

The theme of labor's uprising, uttered so vividly in Markham's *The Man with the Hoe*, broadened in Gelett Burgess's *Darkness Before Dawn*, ringing through Giovanitti, Oppenheim, Untermeyer, in Margaret Widdemer's *God and the Strong Ones*, in Samuel A. DeWitt, in Franklin P. Adams, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and scores more,—is another instance where an age's desire finds utterance in individual poets, colored slightly in each case by the poet's own personality, but after all group speech of a group desire. The anthology *America Arraigned;*

appearing after the Sacco-Vanzetti case shook the continents, showed the American poets almost a unit in condemning the execution of these two radicals, as martyrs to labor's cause. Group speech of a group desire. . . .

We have arrived this far, then: poems are wrung out of sensitive individuals by the pressure of the environment, causing their desires that break forth into song. These are usually typical of the group. Where they are not typical, they remain expressed wishes of some small sub-section of the group.

Poems, largely group-produced, especially when ratified by the group, become the group's expressed wishes: the utterance of their heaven upon earth.

Ideas and emotions, causing poems and other artistic products, are in the air, and many poets of each age express the same thing.

We achieve heavens constantly. We will never achieve the ultimate heaven upon earth: for there will always be desires that conflict and tease. No one would enjoy an absolute heaven: it would have no wishes, and hence no poetry, no art.

Today's heaven faintly prefigures what actual tomorrow will be. Out of today's poetry we may read tomorrow's actuality.

Shall we stop at this, or seek further to isolate the nature of these group wishes, or the forces behind them that cause the group wishes?

We are treading on trembling ground now. The discoveries of Einstein and his followers as to reality, and their application to life, are yet at the suckling stage, hardly recognizable as human. Yet we may venture, as a challenge to other thinkers, subject to correction by other thinkers.

What is the nature of these emotions, these wishes, these ideas, these forces, that are in the air, dominate an age, become its tomorrow? Can they be pictured to the intelligence?

Recurring to the row of corn-stalks, the forces of desire for sun, for rain, for fertile soil, for lack of choking weed, are innate, inborn, in vegetable life itself. Matter, having risen above the inanimate through the crystalline and colloid stages to the vital stage, and thence to the vegetable, in the vegetable

stage is filled to overflowing with a demand for these four things. Without them, it ceases to exist as life, and returns to lifelessness.

Matter itself is merely energy: Millikan and the physicists have established that. One form of energy, vegetable matter, demands these other forms. Another form of energy, human life, demands food and shelter, love, and, more subtly, demands energic expression and satisfaction of its desire for wider love, for beauty, for emotional satisfaction in religion, for wisdom. All forms of energy desire the return to the original state: which, in the case of life, is lifelessness, or death.

Given an emergency, and the collective fact of these desires is obvious. In famine time, an individual may command himself not to desire the absent food: but this command will be unavailing. He will demand it with the others. It is so with love, when love is withheld. It is so with man's craving for beauty, wisdom, death, when these are withheld or postponed. From this standpoint, we can adopt two points of view:

Each individual, as a solitary expression of the communal nature, individually wishes and demands these things: or—
An actual group demand, expressing itself through each individual.

This actual group demand is a manifestation of energy, and has reality. It achieves this reality to our senses only when operating through the receiving sets and uttering sets of individual personalities: but, as a manifestation of energy, it is real, even if it finds no human outlet.

The simultaneity of discoveries, inventions, group demands, points toward the correctness of this view.

But we can go further than this, thanks to Einstein.

Einstein holds that the three dimensions of space have no reality, independent of time. That is, a cube, a solid, this desk I write at, this house I work in, this book you read, has no reality, unless it has duration. Windsor Castle is unreal, until it has duration: unless it is located at some time.

Similarly, time has no reality, unless it has the three spatial dimensions. The year 1492 has no reality, unless it occurred

at some place. Abstract time, abstract space, are unreal: what is real is the relation between space and time, which Einstein called the *Einsteinian interval.*

Time is then seen as a dimension, not essentially different from the spatial ones. It may be called the fourth dimension. Thus the reality, *that oak tree* outside the window or in the park, is not the tree you see this moment: that is merely a cross section of the tree. The same tree, seen yesterday, is still a part of the same tree. The whole object, tree, is a continuum in the four dimensions: which may be mentally imaged as a long grove consisting of a single tree, starting with the emergence of the tree from the acorn, stretching through its sapling size to its maturity, and so to its end: with alternate seasons of leafiness and leaflessness.

Our beginning, the acorn, and our ending, are arbitrary, mere conveniences of thought. Through the acorn the tree is connected with its parent tree; this with all oak trees; this with all life; this with all matter; this with all energy. The class object *oak tree,* in the fourth dimension, is an infinite-fingered series of groves, each consisting of solitary trees extending down time. So with the others.

The object, yourself, is not what you may survey in the mirror at this moment. The object *you* begins with your engendering in the mother's womb, or your delivery; grows through childhood, adolescence, manhood or womanhood, old age, to death. The beginning and the end are arbitrary. You are connected with the parent, with the family, with the human race, with animal life, with all life, with all matter, with all energy. Any stage of this can be visualized, in the fourth dimension, as a many-fingered continuum or extension in the four dimensions.

It is easy, once the trick is learned, to think, to see, in the fourth dimension, or in the four dimensions.

Now if time is a dimension, one thing inevitably follows: that changes in time are unreal: are illusions caused by our sensory limitations. If we could see the entire object, tree, we would see the whole single-treed grove at once. If you could see the whole object, yourself, you would see the whole single-personed grove, from babyhood to death. And so with the rest.

This is borne out by the fact that time is, in actuality, an un-

reality. What time are you conscious of? Not the future: that, you will say, has not occurred yet.

Not the past: that, you will say, has actually happened, and is dead: as far as your senses are concerned. You can not revisit it, for all your longing.

Not the present either. Pause and consider this. It takes some brief time for sensory impressions to reach your mind. What you sense as the present is not the present: it is the immediate past, already, by your understanding, non-existent.

This indicates that the dimension time, whose reality can not be doubted, in all probability exists, past, present, future, equally: and that only the limitations of human sensory apparatus make us see this one fragment—the immediate past—clearly, with no senses to apprehend the rest.

If this is so—if time is a dimension—then changes in time are illusions; are unreal. Growth is unreal; evolution is unreal; energy, matter, as far as the four dimensions are concerned, are static, stationary, unmoving.

Our senses see movement in time. It is as if, along this human grove of yourself, intertwined with the human and non-human groves of other persons and things, there passes, from birth to death, a spark through the brain, the register of the senses, illumining the surroundings: dull at times during sleep, bright at times, supernally bright at rare moments: glancing dimly forward into what we call the future, homesickly back at what we call the past, and only effective on the immediate past, which we call the present. This passes once, and then dies. We call this death. The thing, you, has existed from time immemorial, past, present, future, formed together and existing together.

What we see as motion in the fourth dimension, time, is really only various stages of a static reality. As if we looked from the ground story to the top of a vast skyscraper. The top exists along with the bottom. To us, the bottom exists first, if we see that first, and so up to the top. We may start looking at the top, and then it exists first, the bottom existing last. Both are sensory illusions: the building, in its entirety, is there, unmoving, all the time.

A pleasant philosophical concept!

But it may be correct. The new astro-physics indicates that it is.

Apparent movement in the fourth dimension, time, is an illusion, caused by our sensory limitations.

What about movements in a higher dimension—a fifth or four-plus-nth dimension, thought?

Similarly, these should finally be isolated as sensory illusions of a static fifth or four-plus-nth dimension.

It is in this dimension that the thoughts, wishes, and emotions that cause poetry move. Such vast group feelings as hunger, as love, such vast group feelings-plus-thoughts as patriotism, love of animals, desire for a Panama canal, desire for the airship, desire of labor for equality with its employers, move here.

Can they be visualized?

They are, first of all, mere energic manifestations, having no material substance: only an energic substance. They are as bodiless as electricity, sound, vision. They are as bodied as electricity, sound, vision: all these have energic bodies.

They are forces—energic forces. They have the power to interpenetrate human bodies, emotions, thoughts, and clothe themselves in poems and actions. They are not specific: the same force that appears first as love of family, and then of tribe, broadens into love of nation, of mankind, of the universe. But the force is always there.

They are born, to our senses, and die, to our senses.

Which means that they come into contact with us, abide, and then depart, having expressed themselves in action, or failed in this expression.

Take the force that caused the liberation of the Negro slaves. Each man's desire for freedom and success in life played its part in this force. Man saw himself (as Whitman and Miss Millay vocally did) in the enslaved, the outcast. In seeking to free the slaves, he sought to free himself. The Northerner especially did this, holding that Negro slavery hardened his work conditions. This force, at a certain stage, interpenetrated man. It caused the liberation of black slaves elsewhere much earlier than in America, as a rule. A resistance to this prolonged its stay

in America: at last the liberation was achieved, and the force dissipated itself in action.

Except that the Negroes were not wholly freed. Many hold that they are more, though more subtly, enslaved today than before the Civil War. As long as this feeling, this emotion, persists, the same energic manifestation is at work interpenetrating men's minds and poems and actions.

Patriotism is similar. It is weakening today, in a growth of its vaster form, perceived as love of mankind. It still penetrates many, especially of the backward—the stunted stalks of corn.

These vast forces, as far as their manifestation to ourselves is concerned, are born, grow, thrive, become actions, die. In all probability, they merely assume another form.

The love force has achieved many forms. It alters from self-love to love of the same sex, and from this to love of the opposite sex. It has strange individual sterile manifestations. During its infancy, with overbursting sap, it contributed much of its energy to religion. It still contributes much to this. Religion is dying: god is thinning out and diluting to a spirit, to Nature, to an unknowable first cause. This almost crowds him out of the universe altogether. His disappearance will drain some of the love energy into other channels. It will not disappear: but it may cease to penetrate men, in all its original force.

How can we visualize these vast energic manifestations, which so interpenetrate and rule our senses?

Let us be fantastic, if necessary. It is easy to visualize yourself as in a four-dimensional world. Let us see ourselves as dead sticks and logs in a fifth or four-plus-n^{th} dimensional world. Above us vast creatures rove—these energic forces. They are bodied in energy: and eyes and senses properly equipped could see them, in their entirety.

Shall we symbolize them as vast dinosaurs, not merely a hundred feet long, but as vast as the universe, some of them, and a thousand centuries long, and longer?

They roam restlessly over their multi-dimensioned universe. They encounter the dead sticks and logs, human beings, and with their snouts interpenetrate them. Alter the picture to imagine them vast parasitic vegetables, if you will, thrusting a root into

each human stick or log. . . . But they roam more like dinosaurs, at least to all but those of higher dimensions than themselves.

Hunger, love, patriotism, desire for beauty, religious ideas, desires for understanding, desires for a return to lifelessness or death—these, and their thousand lesser kin, are the vast super-dinosaurs roaming this madly fantastic world.

In such a fantastic conception of reality, is it any wonder that it is futile for the mote, man, to seek fully to understand all reality? He may come ever closer to it; but that is all.

We have had our little excursion: let us return to the earth, with its sweet illusions of growth and evolution, of today and tomorrow.

Some things are sure to us, bound as we are by our sensory illusions. We can read the land's soul, its desires, through its poetry: we can vaguely sense tomorrow out of today's song.

On toward the present. . . .



THE VALHALLA OF SWEET ECHOES

"Until the tempter came to Nell;
It dazzled her, alas, she fell!"

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VI

THE VALHALLA OF SWEET ECHOES

America's first burst of accepted poetry—Halleck, Drake, Bryant, Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, and the rest—was robust echoes of English song. Detested Poe, unaccepted Whitman, were more original. Now all these had passed out of the picture.

New English models sprang up, tall models: Keats, Shelley, Byron, Arnold, Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning, Kipling. Many American singers still tease the drying breasts of these singers.

The land had increasingly important things to say. But, barring the folk-music, the imitators, the echoers, held this hour. The art of poetry rigidified and frigidified. The American soul spoke in a borrowed language, with aped themes, and an emasculated style. We must dig out of this a vision of the land's altering heaven.

i.

Here is an old song, rooted in the twilight of black slavery—the Negro folk poetry. A race so humble, so bound to the lowest gratifications of life, would not fail to hymn food constantly:

> Bring along yo' hot cawn,
> Bring along yo' col' cawn,
> But I say bring along,
> Bring along yo' Jimmyjohn.

Negro demands for prohibition have never been noteworthy. There are hunting songs, akin to the Indian hunting charms, addressed to the coon or raccoon, the squirrel; there are more domestic hunting songs:

Ol' Bre'r Ben's a good ol' man,
He don't steal chickens lak he useter;
He went down de chicken roos' las' Friday night,
An' tuck off a dominicker rooster.

There are apostrophes to the hoecake, to ham, to chicken pie, to coffee, to watermelon, to flapjacks, to cabbage, to potatoes, and most of all there is *Shortnin' Bread:*

Put on de skillet, put on de lead,
Mammy's gonter bake a little shortnin' bread.
Dat ain't all she's gonter do,
Mammy's gonter make a little coffee too.
Mammy's little baby love shortnin', shortnin',
Mammy's little baby love shortnin' bread.

A Congo paradise, with plenty to eat . . . a victualled Eden. . . .

During slavery, the Negroes were supposed to be all sheep-like and uncomplaining. Their song says something else:

My ol' Missis promise me,
When she die, she set me free. . . .
My ol' Missis she somehow gone,
An' she lef' Uncle Sambo a-hillin' up cawn. . . .

Yes, my ol' Massa promise me,
But his papers didn' leave me free.
A dose of pizen he'ped him along:
May de debbil preach his funeral song!

The Negroes are exhorted to "Die in de pig-pen fightin'!" Ran sings "I'd rather be a nigger dan a po' white man." Wild Nigger Bill from Redpepper Hill boasts, "I's done kilt de boss." A song out of Reconstruction days pictures the impoverished master and mistress with nothing to eat; with the Negro singer's insistence that they go back to dish-washing and farming, since Negro slavery is ended. There was the nobler spiritual:

O freedom! O freedom!
O freedom, over me!
And before I'd be a slave,
I'd be buried in my grave,
And I'd go home to my God,
And be free.

Some years later, the boll weevil crossed the Rio Grande, menacing the cotton crops. This evoked the renowned saga:

Fu'st time I seen de boll weevil,
He wuz sittin' in de Square;
Nex' time I seed him,
He had his whole damn family dere,
Jes' a-lookin' for a home.

There were constant songs extolling the dope habit, as the one commencing "Cocaine Bill an' Morphine Sue." The railroad, the dummy line, so impressed the Negro, that he promptly ran both into heaven, as *De Gospel Train* and other spirituals establish.

Alberry A. Whitman's *The Rape of Florida*, appearing in 1884, repeated the spirit of this in polished verse:

Is manhood less because man's face is black? . . .
Oh, let me see the Negro night and morn,
Pressing and fighting in, for place and power!
All earth is place—all time th' auspicious hour!

Paul Laurence Dunbar, one of the American laureates of the race, rose out of the melody of *When De Cawn-pone's Hot* into an admission that life had not dealt gently with him:

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come double;
And that is life!

Again, with utter bitterness:

> The poor man went to the rich man's doors;
> "I come as Lazarus came," he said.
> The rich man turned with humble head,—
> "I will send my dogs to lick your sores!"

The cowboy ballads picture earth, as a rule, as hell:

> The cowboy's life is a dreadful life,
> He's driven through heat and cold;
> I'm almost froze with the water on my clothes,
> A-ridin' through heat and cold.

He is "a poor, lonesome cowboy," remote from father, mother, brother, sister, sweetheart. While "the rich man sleeps on his velvet couch," a lovely picture, the cowboy's life is "a dreary, dreary life." There is the great lament of "starving to death on a government claim"; and the greater picaresque tale of *The Buffalo Skinners:*

He fed us on such sorry chuck I wished myself most dead,
It was old jerked beef, croton coffee, and sour bread.
Pease River's as salty as hell fire, the water I could never go; . . .
For God's forsaken the buffalo range and the damned old buffalo.

But America's sleeker voices spoke differently. John James Ingalls uttered *Opportunity*, holding that it knocked once, and once only, on every man's door. Edward Rowland Sills retorted with verses of the same title, holding that a king's son, wounded, saved the day by using a shattered sword. The former song spoke truetalk:

> But those who doubt or hesitate
> Condemned to failure, penury and woe,
> Seek me in vain and uselessly implore—
> I answer not, and I return no more.

But the latter was adopted as America's song. Every American was more than a king's son, or a king: opportunity was always open to him, to be president, to light a Murad, to buy a Rolls-Royce, to use Forhan's. If only Ella Wheeler Wilcox had written the second poem, America's real laureate of the hour would have given it immortality.

The casualness of doom impressed the American poet. Thus Francis Bret Harte, in *Fate:*

> But the ship sailed safely over the sea,
> And the hunters came home from the chase in glee;
> And the town that was builded upon a rock
> Was swallowed up in the earthquake's shock.

Reality slowly alters airy ideals.

Sidney Lanier came midway of this period: and his song was not echoes. He struck like a charge of armored tanks:

> O Trade! O Trade! would thou wert dead! . . .
> Yea, what avail the endless tale
> Of gain by cunning and plus by sale?
> Look up the land, look down the land,
> The poor, the poor, the poor, they stand. . . .
> "The beasts, they hunger, and eat, and die;
> And so do we, and the world's a sty;
> Hush, fellow-swine; why nuzzle and cry?
> *Swinehood hath no remedy. . . .*
> But who said once, in a lordly tone,
> *Man shall not live by bread alone,*
> *But all that cometh from the Throne?*
> Hath God said so?
> But Trade saith *No:*
> And the kilns and the curt-tongued mills say: *Go:*
> *There's plenty that can, if you can't: we know.*
> *Move out, if you think you're underpaid.*
> *The poor are prolific; we're not afraid;*
> *Trade is Trade."*

An indirect argument for birth-control. His *June Dreams in January*, published posthumously, flung straight into the face of God his utter poverty, his wife's need of life's bare necessities; and demanded of God the fairness of his ability to create dreams of June in his soul,

> Yet cannot make a poorest penny-loaf
> Out of this same chill matter, no, not one
> For Mary, though she starve upon my breast?

It is out of want that dreams and heavens come. Again, in forthright language, Lanier foretold behaviorism:

> *Frown*, quoth my lord Stomach,
> And I lowered.
> *Quarrel*, quoth my lord Liver,
> And I lashed my wife and children,
> Till at the breakfast-table
> Hell sat laughing on the egg-cup.

The philippics against drink far exceeded the philuppics. Warfield Creath Richardson's *The Old Decanter*, typographically set up in the form of a decanter, was the most popular of these temperance songs against drink,

That puts to shame your conquerors that slay their scores below,
For this has deluged millions with the lava tide of woe.

At the age of ninety-three, this fine old gentleman stumped the state of Alabama against prohibition. But *The Old Decanter* had done its work too well.

Julia A. Moore, the "Sweet Singer of Michigan," was vehement against drink. She laurelled *Temperance Reform Clubs:*

> Many a man joined the club
> That never drank a drachm,
> Those noble men were kind and brave,
> They care not for the slang,—

an astonishing result of opposition to liquor. More sweeping are the liquid strains of *Alcohol*, by James Byron Elmore, of Alamo, Indiana:

Alcohol is like a snake;
It can't be kept in bounds;
It makes of one a perfect wreck,
A wandering vagrant hound.

It steals away an active brain,
And fills one with remorse,
And causes people to go insane,
Their soul is all morose.

During the same period, and later, Dr. J. W. Haines of Cincinnati was flooding the country with alcohol-cure ads, containing:

For there's no sunshine in my heart
When moonshine's in his head.

Soda water somehow avoided the Juggernaut tread of the prohibition bards; but Mrs. J. E. Richmond shocked the nation with—

But "only a glass of cider"
Threw open the gates again
To a pathway of pain and sorrow,
To a death of hopeless pain.

We shudder to think of the ravages that Cherry Smash and Whistle may be achieving even now!

James Byron Elmore has been accused of being the father to this glorious fatherless gem:

Sassafras, oh sassafras!
Thou art the stuff for me!
And in the spring I love to sing,
Sweetest sassafras, of thee.

Lynas Clide Seal, another Hoosier, pours real melody into his laudation of a favorite food:

My fancy's pale surrounds the vale
Of pawpaw thickets by the brook,
Where, in the night, unscared, regale
Opossums in the darkest nook,
Eating sweet pawpaws,
Russet rind pawpaws,
Sweet molten pawpaws
Down by the brook.

The bard of Schildkraut's Vegetarian Restaurant, in New York City, wrote reams of verses advising:

Man by nature belongs to the frugiverous class,
His food is (should be) fruits, grains and garden sass.

Elmore is the laureate of the railroad wreck. *The Wrecked Train* swings into it:

We boarded the train on the Northern Pacific,
The mountain scenery was grand and prolific.

This wreck ends deathlessly. *The Monon Wreck* is something else again:

But there they lay on the crimson snow,
Their hearts have ceased to ebb and flow;
Their mangled forms are cold in death;
The awful shock has drawn their breath. . . .

And yonder in the wreck I see
A man that's pinioned down by the knee,
And hear him moaning and to say:
"Cut, oh, cut my leg away!"

The poet, with the aid of a jackscrew, saves the leg and the situation.

The railroad brought the train-robber; and the train-robber, in the person of Jesse James and others, became America's Robin Hood—the poor man's outlaw:

> Jesse James was a lad that killed a-many a man,
> He robbed the Danville train,
> But that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard
> Has laid poor Jesse in his grave. . . .
>
> Jess went to his rest with his hand on his breast,
> The devil will be upon his knee.
> He was born one day in the county of Clay,
> And came from a solitary race.

And always, "Jesse was a man, a friend to the poor."

The Sweet Singer had her own word about labor:

> If it were not for our laboring man, what would our nation do?
> Take this in con-sid-er-a-tion.

The tune is *Marching Through Georgia.* Dr. Ralph M. Thompson, of Savannah, Georgia, uttered an immortal quatrain on the social chasm:

> Between the pauper and the pampered prince,
> The rugged lackey and the lacquered great,
> Both men and women evermore evince
> The disposition to discriminate.

Robert Loveman, a gentle Southern singer, protested vehemently against child labor, for the sake of dividends. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a brilliant relative of the Beechers, in *Hardly a Pleasure* sang of the fate of the three men who rode the trucks on a train, told by the girl in the Pullman berth:

> She complained to her friends that morning
> Of a most distressing dream;
> "I thought I heard in the darkness
> A sort of a jolting scream!

"I thought I felt in the darkness
The great wheels joggle and swing;
Travelling's hardly a pleasure,
When you dream such a horrible thing!"

They crept shuddering out in the morning,
Red spots with the coal's black stain.
"Travelling's hardly a pleasure,"
Said the two men under the train.

William Vaughn Moody, a cloistered dramatist, spoke the hour's unrest in *Gloucester Moors*. He sees the earth as a ship of souls:

By her battened hatch I leaned and caught
Sounds from the noisome hold,—
Cursing and sighing of souls distraught
And cries too sad to be told.
Then I strove to go down and see;
But they said, "Thou art not of us!"
I turned to those on deck with me,
And cried, "Give help!" But they said, "Let be:
Our ship sails faster thus."

A sensitive social conscience: but the poet feels himself out of the suffering class. Stephen Crane, a brilliant disintegrated genius, pictured labor as building a huge ball of masonry on a hilltop:

Of a sudden, it moved:
It came upon them swiftly;
It crushed them all to blood.
But some had opportunity to squeal.

And now came the voice all had been waiting for: the voice of utter tremendous protest. Edwin Markham, a former cattle-herder of California, awoke America and the world with *The Man with the Hoe*, "the battle-cry of the next thousand years" to its admirers, and disgruntled flatulency to its opponents. It is in the Miltonic style:

Bowed by the weight of centuries, he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain? . . .

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this man?
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—
With those who shaped him to the thing he is—
When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries?

We have had semi-answers to these questions, in land after land: Russia especially furnishing an ambiguous bright retort. If you ask kingdoms and kings how they are making out under the social revolution, they will answer that the king business has become positively rotten. Republics and presidents are looking a bit bilious, too.

This was the trumpet-call. An orchestra took up the strain, and spread it over the world. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, a nice versifier, applied it to Russia:

Wait till a million scourged men
Rise in their awful might, and then
God save the Czar!

He did not.

Meanwhile, life as a whole was now this, now that, depending on who did the singing. To Stephen Crane, it was all futile; to Joaquin Miller, as in *Columbus*, when a light was seen on shore,

It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!
It grew to be Time's burst of dawn.
He gained a world; he gave that world
Its grandest lesson: "On! sail on!"

This gymnastic telescoping of three hundred years, between the bonfire on San Salvador and the birth of the American flag, into one line, with the pat moralistic tag at the end, made the poem inspirationally popular. Ambrose Bierce, a lauded second-rater, saw trouble coming when majorities insurged, as when Greed made the land cringe:

Nay, when the steps to State are worn
In hollows by the feet of thieves,
And Mammon sits among the sheaves
And chuckles while the reapers mourn,

his only recommendation is that God veil his patient face; and that an angel be substituted for the American eagle.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, celebrated for her early discreet poems of passion, grew into the people's laureate with such soothing syrup as:

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;
For this brave old earth must borrow its mirth,
It has troubles enough of its own.

It is easy enough to be pleasant
When life flows by like a song,
But the man worth while is the one who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.

America was not all cut to this pattern. Emily Dickinson beheld, and disapproved; but she recommended, not revolt, but a sensitive soul's cloistered privacy:

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more. . . .

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

But America unlocked the door, and threw the key away.

ii.

In this hour of confused echoes, love fared fragmentarily. The Negro sang his proposal frankly:

Den, ma'am, I has desire, an' quick temptation,
To jine my fence to yo' plantation.

Differing strata of the race sang their antipathies, as well as their desires, as in *I Would Not Marry a Black Girl;* and also *I Wouldn't Marry a Yaller Nigger Gal. The Newly Weds* illustrates that all was not prune whip, after courting was over:

First Month. "Set down in my cabin, Honey."
Second Month. "Stand up, my Pie."
Third Month. "You go to wu'k, you wench—
You well to wu'k as I!"

The Negro ballads are full of women who ran away with another man; with vengeance or mourning blues as the harvest. The strength of the desire is not to be doubted:

Oh a black-headed woman make a preacher leave town,
But a red-headed woman make a boy strike his pappy down.

The cowboy ballads are even rawer meat:

Bad women to a certainty are the downfall of men,
As Adam was beguiled by Eve,

as *Fuller and Warren* has it. *Macaffie's Confession* is typical:

Ah, well I mind the fatal day
When Hatty stole my heart away,
'Twas love for her controlled my will,
And did cause me my wife to kill.

There are several gross of knives buried in snowy white breasts, cartons of poison administered, and other sadistic variations.

Other American ballads continue the strain. *Wicked Polly* proceeds:

"Your counsels I have slighted all,
My carnal appetite to fill.
When I am dead, remember well
Your wicked Polly groans in hell!"

She wrung her hands and groaned and cried,
And gnawed her tongue before she died,
Her nails turned black, her voice did fail,
She died and left this lower vale.

Apparently all Polly had done was to "go to balls and dance and play." It is not even said that she drank cider; much less, that she fell or was pushed into a love-affair. But this is implied; and the double standard of morality, lauded by Goldsmith, breathes through the song.

Poor Omie gave poet and audience many a muscle-stiffening thrill:

He kicked her and stomped her, he threw her in the deep. . . .
"Go hang me or kill me, for I am the man
Who drowned little Omie below the mill dam."

With Paul Laurence Dunbar, love lifted. *Lover's Lane* is lovely dialect verse:

An' dis thought will allus rise
Down in lovah's lane;
Wonder whethah in de skies
Dey's a lovah's lane;
If dey ain't, I tell you true,
'Ligion do look mighty blue,
'Cause I don' know what I'd do
'Dout a lovah's lane.

John Hay, Lincoln's secretary and a distinguished politician for two score years after that president's death, eleganted the double standard:

"I loved,—and, blind with passionate love, I fell.
Love brought me down to death, and death to Hell.
For God is just, and death for sin is well."

Warfield Creath Richardson, in *Gaspar*, was observantly cynical:

Better in single blessedness to tarry
Than post precipitate to nuptial bed;
Excessive fruitfulness must ever carry
The brand of censure on its guilty head.

More foreshadowing of the movement for birth control. He goes on,

Be cash in marriage, then, your crucial test,
Since other charms are fleeting as the wind; . . .
It heightens worth; supplies the want of sense;
And lifts a boor to rank and eminence.

And Richardson, whilom professor of classical languages at the University of Alabama, smoked up the stock of his small tobacco store, and thereafter lived half a century in beaming poverty.

Henry Cuyler Bunner, in this age of sweet echoes, sang unsatisfied love like a purl from the Greek anthology:

Though the upland plains are snowy,
Though the snow is on the plain—
Chloe! Chloe! Chloe! Chloe!
But she answers not again.

His *Da Capo* is hardly more than Provençal luting, as he sings a love—

How fair was its face in the morning,
How close its caresses at noon,
How its evening grew chill without warning
Unpleasantly soon!

We can hardly believe this, so tripping is the treatment.

Sidney Lanier, ears deaf to Whitman's pedestalling of the female beside the male, disapproves of the double standard agonizedly:

What shameful ways have women trod
At beckoning of Trade's golden rod! . . .
O purchased lips that kiss with pain!
O checks coin-spotted with smirch and stain!
O trafficked hearts that break in twain!

There is little pain in these kisses; and what a complexion coins can buy! The hearts rarely break in twain, unless credit, instead of cash, is begged for. Lanier saw one way out:

Shall woman scorch for a single sin
That her betrayer may revel in? . . .
Shall ne'er prevail the woman's plea,
We maids would far, far whiter be
If that our eyes might sometimes see
Men maids in purity?

Whitman did not advocate continence. But Lanier was a Galahad, fitter for a spotless Camelot than for Yonkers and Duluth.

The problem of the double standard of morality troubled Stephen Crane. When a man accepted part of the blame with the woman, all the people screamed "Fool!" at him. Yet Crane

is under the spell of the double standard thinking: he says the man and the woman "sinned."

The popular songs had no uncertainty about this matter. Here is *We Never Speak as We Pass By*, an adored song of the time:

> Until the tempter came to Nell,
> It dazzled her, alas, she fell! . . .
> And when the flatterer casts aside
> My fallen and dishonored bride,
> I'll close her eyes, in death forgive,
> And in my heart her name shall live.

In his heart, as in the cemetery. *She Has Seen Better Days*, title subject to correction, ends a bit foggily,

> She told me her life, she was once a good wife,
> Respected and honored by all;
> Her husband had fled ere they were wed,
> And tears down her eyes sadly fall.

Unless they roped him and brought him back, this is obscure. But *The Fatal Wedding*, the weepy *After the Ball*, *With All Her Faults I Love Her Still*, *Take Back Your Gold*, *She Is More to Be Pitied than Censured*, the glorious *A Bird in a Gilded Cage*, *The Mansion of Aching Hearts*, Hugh d'Arcy's *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, all have the same theme:

It didn't take long to know him, and before the month had flown
My friend had stolen my darling, and I was left alone;
And ere a year of misery had passed above my head,
The jewel I had treasured so had tarnished and was dead.

The whole poem utters the wish: that the woman be tempted, that she fall, that she die for it. *Ostler Joe* moves in the same rut:

> Annie listened and was tempted—
> Was tempted, and she fell,
> As the angels fell from Heaven
> To the blackest depths of Hell.

After treading "the stage half-naked," a half-way stage to modern leg drama, and selling her kisses to rich titled roues for gold, she died on her hostler husband's breast.

The flowering of this is *Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl:*

Her dear old mother's words proved true, for soon the poor girl met
A man who on her ruin was intent;
He treated her respectful as those villains always do,
And she supposed he was a perfect gent.

Then the vile trick is tried: he offers her a demitasse!

Stand back, villain, go your way! here I will no longer stay!
Although you were a marquis or an earl;
You may tempt the upper classes with your villainous demitasses,
But Heaven will protect the working girl.

The Puritan strain appears in Belle R. Harrison, writing from semi-cavalier Alabama:

Lusts of the flesh must needs be crucified.

Today says, must needs not. Langdon Smith's *Evolution,* for all of the mesalliance it opens with, is a fine Darwinian love song:

When you were a tadpole and I was a fish,
In the Paleozoic time,
And side by side on the ebbing tide
We sprawled through the ooze and slime,
Or skittered with many a caudal flip
Through the depths of the Cambrian fen,
My heart was rife with the joy of life,
For I loved you even then.

Love in the hands of the Village Miltons echoed the popular theme. Elmore paints heroines of 100% propriety:

She never flirts with transient people,
Neither hangs on the gate for show,
But allures by charms so graceful,
Bessie, the Belle of Alamo.

Seduction—what would life be without it?—appears in the sad saga of Pearl Bryan. Scott Jackson, "an imp of the lewd."

Betrayed this kind maiden, her heart he did break,
Who laid down her life for a villain's sake.

He tolled the girl, already anticipating a birth notice in the local papers, to Cincinnati, and with his accomplices drove her across the river:

With cocaine and dagger these fiends, 'tis said,
Relieved this poor damsel of a beautiful head.
When the moon's rays reflected the bright, shining steel
She fainted within and began for to kneel.
"Oh, God, save the distressed, and care for me quick!
Take me to heaven." Then came the death lick.

Ardeen Foster, in his *Revised Fourth Unabridged Edition* of his *Poetical Works*, in *Pamina* treated eloquently of seduction:

The maid woke limp and luscious in his arms. . . .
And raised her tear-veiled eyes, a conquered serf. . . .
Rained kisses on her master till he fell. . . .
The Conscience-bells tolled in a bitter dirge,
A blushing silence clutched the Springtide winds,—

an astounding result of a little loveplay. The poet knows:

Men come in time to loathe illicit love, . . .
Till in disgust they cast the wench adrift.
But no man . . . robs a virgin of her chastity
But withers of God's curse upon his soul.

In fact,

A woman's fall from grace unnerves her God.

Who could ask for more? And there is more seduction in this unabridged edition. *Bitter-Sweet, The Artist's Tale, Bilhah,* reek with it. But for up- and downright morality, give us Mary Ann O'Byrne, of Watervleit, New York. Thus her *Address to Young Ladies* decries accepted actions:

No lady or gentleman
Ever took lonely walks or rides alone,
And returned with as clear a conscience
As when they left their home.

If a man insults you, hit him:

And if you give him the nosebleed,
It will help clear his brain,
Then the greatest respect for you
He will ever afterward maintain.

To the opposite extreme was the courtly love of the accepted singers. Thus Thomas Bailey Aldrich:

Goodnight! I have to say goodnight
To such a host of peerless things!
Goodnight unto the slender hand
All queenly with its weight of rings;
Goodnight to fond, uplifted eyes,
Goodnight to chestnut braids of hair,
Goodnight unto the perfect mouth
And all the sweetness nestled there.
The snowy hand detains me? Then
I'll have to say Goodnight again!

Here's James Whitcomb Riley, strumming to the people's heart:

For you, I could forget the gay
Delirium of merriment,
And let my laughter die away
In endless silence of content.

J. Appleton has this encouragement for philandering:

Somewhere she waits to make you win
Your soul in her firm white hands—
Somewhere the gods have made for you
The woman who understands.

We almost return to the Cavalier poets in this lyric of Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey:

In her body's perfect sweet
Suppleness and languor meet,—
Arms that move like lapping billows,
Breasts that Love would make his pillows,
Eyes where vision melts in bliss,
Lips that ripen to a kiss.

Richard Watson Gilder ventures to speak *A Woman's Thoughts:* for woman is a bit dumb now, after her first burst of song:

I am a woman—therefore
I may not
Call to him, cry to him,
Fly to him,
Bid him delay not!

She asks, in the end, God to pity her, because of her enforced dumbness. Define it your own way.

Emily Dickinson's usual mood is continence:

So we must keep apart,
You there, I here,
With just the door ajar
That oceans are.

Did the harebell loose her girdle
To the lover bee,
Would the bee the harebell hallow
Much as formerly?

Who cares? Certainly not the harebell or the bee.

Mrs. Gilman is eloquent, where Miss Dickinson is astringently poetic. She saw woman as altered into humanness. *Similar Cases* is brilliant satire against those who deny the possibility of this. When an enterprising Neolithic man told his neighbors that one day they would be civilized, with diseases, and Accomplishments, and Sins:

Then they all rose up in fury
Against their boastful friend,
For prehistoric patience
Cometh quickly to an end. . . .
Cried all, "Before such things can come,
You idiotic child,
You must alter Human Nature!"
And they all sat back and smiled.
Thought they, "An answer to that last
It will be hard to find!"
It was a clinching argument—
To the Neolithic Mind!

She pictured man's agelong despoiling of woman, in binding her close, to prevent her escape; in weakening her, lest she be strong to flee:

And woman? He will hold her—he will have her when he pleases—
And he never once hath seen her since the prehistoric time! . . .
The woman-soul is rising, in despite of thy transgression;
Loose her now—and trust her! She will love thee yet!

The land is jazzing up its mood, as the popular songs at the opening of the twentieth century indicate. *My Wife's Gone to*

the Country, Hurray! Hurray!; I Love My Wife, but Oh You Kid; I Love My Husband, but Oh You Henry; Smother Me with Kisses and Kill Me with Love; Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Lovey Mine; I'd Like a Little Loving Now and Then—these are beginning to sit up and take notice. The words are waking:

> Said she, "My dear, I sadly fear
> That you have been in truth with some wild youth,
> You had better say, just say,
> Where you have been today!"
> Said I, "Dear Aunt, I fear I can't
> Quite tell you where I've been, and what I've seen,
> But in consequence,—sequence,
> Why, I've had experience!"

As for marriage, *The Party That Wrote "Home Sweet Home" Never Was a Married Man* gave the moment's mood. There was still the crescent over-adulation of the mother, revealed in *She Was a Grand Old Lady, Mother Machree,* and many another sobsong. And Mother's Day. Father away at business, mother at home with the children—the continent began to have an overlove for the mother. And this led to philandering, in the search exemplified in *I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl That Married Dear Old Dad.* She couldn't be found; but the search had its temporary compensations.

iii.

Out of sexual love, and the nature of the mammal, grow love of offspring, family, the human race, and the universe. Negro lullabies are proverbial:

> Hushaby, don't you cry,
> Go to sleep, little baby.
> And when you wake you shall have a cake,
> And all the pretty little ponies.

Dunbar sang exquisitely of *Little Brown Baby Wif Sparklin' Eyes;* Belle R. Harrison's *My Baby* is similar. Mrs. Gilman, as

was to be expected, adds a modicum of thinking to the ancient cry:

Then bring me others! "A child" is a crime;
It is "children" who grow through the beautiful time
Of their childhood up to the age you are in.

She visualized a new motherhood:

Her child . . . taught human love by feeling human love, . . .
Taught to love all mankind and serve them fair
By seeing, from his birth, all children served
By the same righteous, all-embracing care.

Eugene Field, in his children's lullabies, sang merely the old mood.

This adulation of the family received an amusing body-blow from Brian Hooker, with his:

Don't swat your mother, boys, just 'cause she's old!
Don't mop the floor with her face;
Think how her love is a treasure of gold,
Shining through shame and disgrace.
Don't put the rocking-chair next to her eye,
Don't bounce the lamp off her bean!
Angels are watching you up in the sky,
Don't swat your mother, it's mean!

Everybody Works but Father, and its kindred, were hardly complimentary to the sire. Then came *Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes*, by Harry T. Graham, which handled the whole family:

Father heard his children scream,
So he threw them in the stream,
Saying, as he drowned the third,
"Children should be seen, *not* heard!"

Baby in the caldron fell,—
See the grief on Mother's brow;
Mother loved her darling well—
Darling's quite hard-boiled by now.

Late last night I slew my wife,
Stretched her on the parquet flooring;
I was loath to take her life,
But I *had* to stop her snoring.

Sam had spirits naught could check,
And today, at breakfast, he
Broke his baby sister's neck,
So he shan't have jam for tea!

Uncle Joe, grandma, Aunt Eliza, nurse, all met with similar fates. *Bluebeard,* in the same volume, chronicles wife-murder by drowning, hanging, strangling, boiling alive, suffocation, poison, dynamite, pushing beneath the train, throwing off the roof. . . . America adored this. Wives were about as popular as French snails.

The volume *Little Willies* rounded out the picture:

Willie and two other brats
Licked up all the Rough-on-Rats.
Father said, when mother cried,
"Never mind, they'll die outside."

Willie fell down the elevator,
Wasn't found till six days later.
Then the neighbors said, "Gee whizz!
What a spoiled child Willie is."

The children of the poor began to receive sympathy, as in Bunner's *A Pitcher of Mignonette,* which—

Is the garden of heaven sent
To the little sick child in the basement.

The same mood spread out to include animals. Duncan Francis Young wrote of the belled cow; *The Bench-Legged Fyce* is famous; *Kentucky Belle* is only one of many tributes to the horse. Bliss Carman broadened the strain to include much:

O dwellers in the dust, arise,
My little brothers of the field.

The dandelions, the fruit boughs, all "dwellers in the desperate dark," are also hailed. There is little progress possible beyond this; Mrs. Gilman merely gives it a social tinge:

We cannot sin alone,
Suffer alone. . . .
For we are one!

The limited version of this, patriotism, still is popular. Here is Charles Brockden Brown's *Independence Bell:*

The old State House bell is silent,
Hushed is now its clamorous tongue;
But the spirit is awakened
Still is living,—ever young.

Even though it, historically, never rang out independence, the poetic belief is what moulds the land's dream. Bunner, so conventional in his love verses, is not less so in his tribute to *The Old Flag:*

Off with your hat as the flag goes by!
And let the heart have its say;
You're man enough for a tear in your eye
That you will not wipe away.

This was the hour of *The Seminole's Defiance:*

I ne'er will ask for quarter, and I ne'er will be your slave,
But I'll swim the sea of slaughter till I sink beneath the wave!

and of *The Uprising of '76:*

"Who dares come out in Freedom's name,
For her to live, for her to die?"

A hundred hands flung up reply,
A hundred voices answered: "I!"

John Hay not unnaturally qualified as one of the laureates of this patriotism:

Our love shall go to meet them,
When the boys come home,
To bless them and to greet them
When the boys come home;
And the fame of their endeavor
Time and change shall not dissever
From the nation's heart forever,
When the boys come home.

There was dissent from the wits, as in Wallace Irwin's *At the Sign of the Dollar:*

Fourth of July, you're a fine old antiquity,
Cured in saltpetre and brimstone and smoke,
Rattlety-bang at the British iniquity,
History crystallized into a joke!

William Vaughn Moody was constantly critical, as in *On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines:*

Let him never dream that his bullet's scream went wide of its island mark,
Home to the heart of his darling land where she stumbled and sinned in the dark.

This is a note that will grow stronger. . . .

iv.

Art was rather slurred. Bret Harte sang of reading *Dickens in Camp;* the Southerner, John R. Thompson, hymned *Music in Camp;* but beauty broke first in Sidney Lanier, as in *Sunrise:*

Oh, what if a sound should be made!
Oh, what if a bound should be laid
To this bow-and-string tension of beauty and silence aspring,
To the bend of beauty the bow, or the hold of silence the string!
I fear me, I fear me yon dome of diaphanous gleam
Will break as a bubble o'er blown in a dream. . . .
If a bound of degree to this grace be laid,
Or a sound or a motion made.

This note runs through the *Marsh Songs*, and many more of his poems. Richardson's *Gaspar* describes a storm, without laying a laurel-wreath at the feet of beauty; yet it holds this:

There's nothing so terrific as the night,
When heaven and hell shake hands across the deep. . . .
While overhead great voices boom aloud,
And momently, by angry fits and snatches,
Huge forms, half seen, and half involved in cloud,
Emerge, while each in height a Titan matches.

Richard Realf's *Indirection* is memorable:

Sweet the exultance of song, but the strain that precedes it is sweeter;
And never yet poem was writ, but the meaning outmastered the metre. . . .
Back of the canvas that throbs, the painter is hinted and hidden;
Into the statue that breathes, the soul of the sculptor is bidden.

Aldrich's *Memory* hints a kindred thing:

My mind lets go a thousand things,
Like dates of wars and deaths of kings,
And yet recalls the very hour—
'Twas noon by yonder village tower,
And on the last blue noon of May—
The wind came briskly up this way,
Crisping the brook beside the road;
Then, pausing here, set down its load

Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
Two petals from that wild-rose tree.

At least one voice, that of Mary Ann O'Byrne, was dead set against what was accepted as High Art. She said so, at vehement length. She took her text from an exhibition of a painting of Mary Magdalene by the priests, and as a devout Catholic devoted her eighth volume to this:

I was present at a masterpiece of the finest art,
And I was so taken by surprise
With the naked pictures that came before me
That I could not believe my eyes. . . .

But if we with our lovely naked forms
Into the church should go
We, the priests and the people,
Into epileptic fits would throw.

Then the whole police force
Would be out upon our trail,
And just because we showed our lovely naked forms
They would land us right in jail.

This could be tested by experiment.

And anyway the artist
Must be a silly clown,
For no saint would have her picture taken
When she was lying down. . . .

So that she must have been unconscious
When he did her picture take,
Or otherwise his camera
She mighty soon would break. . . .

No lady that has strength to rise
Will ever dare to lay
When a priest or doctor calls to see her,
The few moments that they stay. . . .

And them little baby angels
' A covering should wear,
For no mother that will love her child
Will exhibit it when it's bare.

This is real criticism of art, and life. Walt Whitman, and a horde of moderns, sought to be Phrynes, and desired the race to reciprocate. If Miss O'Byrne could have met him and them, she would have taught them and him a thing or two.

v.

When we reach the Negro spirituals and shout-songs, we reach the amplest stretch of America's contribution to religious poetry.

The Negro was brought to America a slave, and inducted into a hell on earth. Pat for his needs a religion was offered him, telling him that hell on earth was part of God's plan, and that in Heaven the last—the Negro slave—would be first, or master, and the first—the white master—would be last. This much the Negro accepted.

The religion went on to dispraise love, drink, joy: the Negro had intelligence enough to ignore this teaching.

He started with a gift for melody, and an unparalleled sense of syncopated rhythm; he served his adopted God with the very tunes with which he had sought to charm the lion in his homeland, with the very rhythms that had warmed the ears of Mumbo Jumbo.

The worshipper was humble:

Keep a-inchin' along, like a poor inch worm,
My Lord will come by an' by.

The masters might ignore his trouble; but—

Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus.

He sang, *I'm Troubled in Mind*—

And if Jesus don't he'p me,
I surely will die.

And again, *I'm So Glad Trouble Don't Last Alway*. There was no humility in his religion: "A band of angels comin' after me, Comin' for to carry me home. Swing low, sweet chariot." Elijah could ask no more. Jesus himself is elevated constantly into King Jesus. As a slave-religion, it sang, *Steal Away to Jesus;* and also—

No more auction block for me, many thousands gone.

This continues, "No more peck of corn for me," "No more pint of salt for me," "No more driver's lash for me". . . . And out of this status came the marching song of the race:

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egyp's lan',
Tell ol' Pharaoh
To let my people go!

This did not refer to the ills of Israel, thirty-seven centuries entombed. It meant something nearer.

The religion was as quaint as the primitive minds that composed it: *Somebody's Knockin' at Yo' Door; The Gospel Train; We Are Climbin' Jacob's Ladder; Little David, Play on Yo' Harp; Roll de Ol' Chariot Along; Run, Mary, Run*—an unexpected appeal to virginal gymnastics. The shout songs, toward the end, mounted with mad gusto:

Listen to de angels shoutin'!

O my little soul's gonter shine, shine!

I'm gonter fly all over God's heaven!

One heartily resung hymn was *Take All de Worl', but Leave Me Jesus*. The whites took this seriously. There was no growth in the religious concept: instead, it was—

Gimme dat ol' time religion,
It's good enough for me.
It was good for de Hebrew children. . . .
It's good enough for me.

The hymns naturally omit the underlying African religion, the various phases of voodoo worship, and the like. But the Negro poets sang thus. Thus James Edwin Campbell had his *De Cunjah Man.* The devil was throughout a vivid figure; he was kin to voodoo deities. The race sang optimistically,

If you wants to see de Devil die,
Feed him up on Gospel pie.

Prayer was efficacious only if the Negro went after the turkey. All this was the humbler mood of the race. Dunbar grew out of religious adolescence swiftly:

There is a heaven, forever, day by day,
The upward longing of my soul doth tell me so;
There is a hell, I'm quite as sure; for pray,
If there were not, where would my neighbors go?

The cowboys had far less religion in their makeup. Their songs largely lack the note, except for the sizzling *The Hell-Bound Train:*

The engine with human blood was damp,
And the headlight was a brimstone lamp.

Satan announces hell as the next stop, where "You'll sizzle and scorch from rind to core."

Then the cowboy awoke with a thrilling cry,
His clothes were wet and his hair stood high;

and he prayed, and avoided the brimstone terminal. This gem has been seriously sung at revival meetings.

John Hay sung a crude faith in the dialect *Little Breeches.* Angels save the little boy from a snowstorm:

> And I think that saving a little child,
> And bringing him to his own,
> Is a derned sight better business
> Than loafing around The Throne.

Lanier's vision tended to clear:

> So pray we to the God we dimly hope
> Against calamities we clearly know.

He at least saw morality as human, and remediable:

> There will one day be medicine to cure crime.

The unnamed author of Zupah, in *The Problem of Human Life Here and Hereafter,* was astounded, on page after page, at modern science:

> Or, in other words, that women
> Are the lineal descendants
> Of the kangaroo or wombat
> Or marsupial opossum!

Not to mention the electric eel, the stinging nettle, and the truffle. He propounds ponderously:

> For if man is but a monkey
> In a higher state of culture,
> And the monkey but a porpoise,
> And the porpoise but ascidian,
> What can man expect or hope for
> As to life beyond the present
> Which is not in store for mollusks?

Well, why shouldn't the blue point and the little neck have a heaven? Our author is as direct as a melodrama villain:

For a man is simply crazy
Who believes that God's existence
To suppose that Darwinism
Harmonizes with religion
Or the soul's immortal nature,
Or the possible existence
Of a book of revelation,
Or of any intervention
On the part of God with mortals.

This states the problem accurately; you cannot serve science and God.

Stephen Crane scolded the deity, for his habit of visiting the sins of the fathers upon their descendants:

Wicked image, I hate thee.
Go, strike with thy vengeance
The heads of these little men
Who come blindly.
It will be a brave thing.

Again, when an angry god was beating a man, with a large audience,

The man screamed and struggled,
And bit madly at the feet of the god.
The people cried,
"Ah, what a wicked man!"
And—
"Ah, what a redoubtable god!"

Emily Dickinson's religion was simpler and softer. She kept her Sabbath at home, with a bobolink for chorister, and an orchard for a dome. She has never talked with God, nor visited at his residence: yet she is sure of both. If she did not chart out a heaven for mollusks, she phrased the rat tribe's tomorrow:

Papa above!
Regard a Mouse
O'erpowered by the Cat;
Reserve within thy kingdom
A "mansion" for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic cupboards
To nibble all the day,
While unsuspecting cycles
Wheel pompously away.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is acidulously critical. She insists that the preacher preach about yesterday, with its interred offenses; not about today; and—

Preach about the other man, Preacher!
The man we all can see!
The man of oaths, the man of strife,
The man who drinks and beats his wife,
Who helps his mates to fret and shirk,
When all they need is to keep at work—
Preach about the other man, Preacher!
Not about me!

Her god is pantheistic, identified with all nature: wind, sea, the sod: even man.

Belle R. Harrison, in her gentle way, is as critical; although she superficially criticizes only Negro religion:

If de motive is right, den whar's de sin?
I stole dem breeches to be baptize' in.

If the crop is ruined, after the Negro's work and praying:

Ef de Lord's done dat, I tell you, sir,
He ain't de man dat I tuck him fur!

And the typical preacher's plea:

Gib yer heart to Gawd Ermighty,
An' yer pocket-book to me!

In this hour of echoes, Bliss Carman sings of Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Tanis, Astarte. The land's song was saturated with minor alien deities. Richard Watson Gilder complacently sang this *Song of a Heathen:*

If Jesus Christ is a man—
And only a man—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him I will cleave alway.

And if Jesus is a god—

I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air!

Morris A. West, in *Romance of Missions*, saw the heathens as wailing:

We are dying fast of hunger,
Starving for the Bread of Life!
Haste, oh hasten! ere we perish,
Send the messengers of life!

This, of course, could not hurt the heathens. Mary Howitt, the Quaker poet, thrilled the land with the allegory of *The Spider and the Fly*, the spider representing the devil, and the fly even as you and I:

He dragged her up his winding stair,
Into his dismal den
Within his little parlor—but
She ne'er came out again!

The popular songs grew sceptical. *He Goes to Church on Sunday* pictures the man as "as crooked and as cunning as a fox" all the rest of the week. But the popular hymns, especially

the Protestant ones, were kindergarten fare, hardly up to the mentality of a seven year old. Verily, ye must become as little children, to enter into this Protestant kingdom of heaven:

> More, more about Jesus,
> More, more about Jesus,
> More of His saving fulness see,
> More of His love who died for me.

The intellectual content is almost zero:

> Floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll,
> Since Jesus came into my heart.

When the worshipper's heart is pained,

> O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
> His heart is touched with my grief.

And many more:

> Jesus met me there! He lifted all my care!
> I shall rise to meet him, Meet him in the air!

> We are redeemed! the price is paid!
> What a wonderful Savior!

> God will take care of you,
> Thro' ev'ry day, o'er all the way—

When troubles come,

> I only need to trust Him more,
> To love Him better than before.

And the meteorological observation:

> When Jesus shows his smiling face,
> There is sunshine in my soul.

I was raised up on this. It is not intellectually stimulating to thinking man. Heaven's chief occupation will be thus singing the wondrous story:

> Sing it with the saints in glory
> Gathered by the crystal sea.

The budget system is advocated for believers:

> Do you know without Jesus your soul will be lost?
> When your Lord you refuse, are you counting the cost?

One line of a Negro spiritual has more life and inspiration than all of this.

vi.

Sidney Lanier was interested in mental processes: in the wish to know more.

> Thought, too, is carnivorous. It lives in meat. We never have an idea whose existence has not been purchased by the death of some atom of our fleshly tissue.

Yet wisdom brought no joy to him:

> How could the Jew who wrote Genesis have known the sadness that ever comes with learning—as if wisdom were still the protégé of the Devil.

Emily Dickinson feared the mind. Let a splinter swerve within the brain,

> 'Twere easier for you
> To put the water back
> When floods have slit the hills,
> And scooped a turnpike for themselves,
> And blotted out the mills!

She preferred a microscope to faith, in an emergency. But no voice as yet rose strongly for intellectual curiosity.

vii.

The longing for the final return, through youth to death, was as dominant as ever. The Negro spirituals throbbed with it over and over:

I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight,
To lay dis body down. . . .
I lie in de grave an' stretch out my arms,
I lay dis body down.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; Deep River; Steal Away to Jesus; You May Bury Me in de Eas'; Death's Gwineter Lay His Icy Hands on Me; The Funeral Train; I Want to Die Easy When I Die; Toll de Bell, Angel, I Jus' Got Over; I Don't Want to be Buried in a Storm, and countless more, say this, with endless exquisite variations.

Death is a recurring theme in the cowboy ballads:

"O bury me not on the lone prairie,"
These words came low and mournfully
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay
On his dying bed at the close of day.

The dolorous *Cowboy's Lament*, the funereal *Only a Cowboy*, the mortuary *Harry Bale* and also *Foreman Monroe*, *The Dying Ranger*, the lugubrious *Young Charlottie*, the obituary *Charlie Rutlage*—like the English folk ballads, and more so, are these treatments of death.

Dunbar, through his varied living irks, longed to return to his carefree unknowing childhood:

Hang a vine by de chimney side,
An' one by de cabin do';
An' sing a song fuh de day dat died,
De day of long ago.

He faced his desire further than this, lauding suicide:

Then seizing Death, reluctant, by the hand,
Leaps with him, fearless, to eternal peace!

He had his *The Stirrup Cup:*

Come, drink a drink before we start;
We've far to ride tonight,
And Death may take the race we make,
And check our gallant flight.

Lanier, racked like Dunbar by life, sang his magnificent homesickness for a return to *The Marshes of Glynn.* Even in troubled sleep the live-oak, the marsh, and the main come to him:

The little green leaves would not let me alone in my sleep;
Upbreathed from the marshes, a message of range and of sweep,
Interwoven with waftures of wild sea-liberties, drifting,
Came through the lapped leaves, sifting, sifting,
Came to the gates of sleep. . . .

I have waked, I have come, my beloved! I might not abide,
I have come ere the dawn, O beloved, my live-oaks, to hide
In your gospelling glooms—to be
As a lover in heaven, the marsh my marsh and the sea my sea. . . .

I must pass from thy face, I must pass from the face of the Sun:
Old Want is awake and agog, every wrinkle a-frown;
The Worker must pass to his work in the terrible town:
But I fear not, nay, and I fear not the thing to be done; . . .
I am lit with the Sun.

Oh, never the mast-high run of the seas
Of traffic shall hide thee,
Never the hell-colored smoke of the factories
Hide thee, . . .

And ever my heart through the night shall with knowledge abide thee,
And ever by day shall my spirit, as one that hath tried thee,
Labor, at leisure, in art,—till yonder beside thee
My soul shall float, friend Sun,
The day being done.

He wrote this with a temperature of a hundred and four. Within the year he had done the thing to be done, which he did not fear. *The Revenge of Hamish* is themed on death; *The Stirrup-Cup* addresses Death:

'Tis thy rich stirrup-cup to me;
I'll drink it down right smilingly.

He was a solitary, like Emily Dickinson:

> Lo, he that hath helped me to do right . . . hath insidiously deflowered the virginity of my will. . . . Each union of self and self is, once for all, incest and adultery and every other crime. . . . Again I cry to thee, O friend, let me alone.

And he sang:

Come, bring the bowl, Death; I am thirsty.

Richardson, in *Gaspar*, yearned back to "boyhood's innocent and headlong bliss":

The trees are greener then; the sky more near;
The flowers more sweet; the landscape far more gay;
The rills make softer music to the ear,
And scantier clouds obscure the face of day;
The rainbow, that so sweetly spans the sphere,
Will shed its hues; the sun withdraw its ray,
That made earth lovely, while our hearts wax cold—
I would to Heaven we never could grow old.

The poet wrote the first draft of this when he was thirty-five; published it when he was fifty-three, and died at ninety-four. I myself am an advocate of death; but I cannot hold with this evaluation of life. I grant the potency of the spell of the golden past, that illusion that puts the Midas touch over the casual dross of yesterday: but this is an error that fades, if today is lived to the fullest. There is more beauty in green now, the sky is fairer, the flowers incredibly dearer, the music of waters sweeter, now than ever before: and the sheer tingling ecstasy of today, toil and rest and love, may not wave-leap as high, but floods more immensely over a continental space, instead of a tiny beach. I myself am an advocate of death, and I echo Lanier's last quoted words: but I do not staccato the process, and I drink the cup before me with utter acceptance, till a darker nectar take its place.

Yet the nostalgic chorus rings on. Samuel Minturn Peck was never more effective than in *The Grape-Vine Swing:*

I'm weary at noon, I'm weary at night,
I'm fretted and sore of heart,
And care is sowing my locks with white
As I wend through the fevered mart.
I'm tired of the world with its pride and pomp,
For to me no joy it can bring;
I'd barter it all for one day's romp,
And a swing in the grape-vine swing.

Swinging in the grape-vine swing,
Laughing where the wild birds sing,
I dream and sigh For the days gone by,
Swinging in the grape-vine swing.

John Hay's ballad of Jim Bludso is themed on death:

Through the hot, black breath of the burnin' boat
Jim Bludso's voice was heard,
And they all had trust in his cussedness,
And knowed he would keep his word.
And, sure's you're born, they all got off

Afore the smokestacks fell,—
And Bludso's ghost went up alone
In the smoke of the Prairie Bell.

This theme, "a man that died for men," lifted this to universal popularity.

Mrs. Julia A. Moore, Michigan's dulcet lutanist, was as much obsessed with funerals as Lydia Hunt Sigourney had been. She must have sat around and prayed for deaths, so that she could put her Muse on high, and turn out another. It is almost impossible to pick between these stately bull-thistles on the mead of poesy, so nearly of a height are they. But cull we must, so cull we will. Of *Hiram Helsel* she sings to the tune of *Give Me Three Grains of Corn, Mother:*

His parents parted when he was small,
And both are married again;
How sad it was for them to meet
And view his last remains.

Of *William Upson:*

It will relieve his mother's heart
That her son is laid in our graveyard;
Now she knows that his grave is near,
She will not shed so many tears.

Little Andrew gets his, to the tune of *The Gipsy's Warning:*

Andrew was a little infant,
And his life was two years old;
He was his parents' eldest boy,
And he was drowned, I was told. . . .
Beneath the raft the water took him,
For the current was so strong,
And before they could rescue him,
He was drowned and was gone.

What could be more pathetic than the death of *Carrie Monroe?*

It's just before her spirit fled,
Her husband stood by her bed;
"Prove faithful, birdie, to me," said
Sweet Carrie Monroe.

Far-off overtones of *The Lady of Shalott.* . . . Even more poignant was the sad period to the career of *Hattie House:*

Those little girls will not forget
The day little Hattie died,
For she was with them when she fell in a fit,
While playing by their side.

And there was hungry *Little Libbie:*

While eating dinner, this dear little child
Was choked on a piece of beef.
Doctors came, tried their skill awhile,
But none could give relief.

Charles Heber Clark (Max Adeler) was an obituarist of the death of children, as this masterpiece, redolent of *The Raven,* attests:

We have lost our little Hanner in a very painful manner,
And we often asked, How can her harsh sufferings be borne?
When her death was first reported, her aunt got up and snorted
With the grief that she supported, for it made her forlorn.
She was such a little seraph that her father, who is sheriff,
Really doesn't seem to care if he ne'er smiles in life again.
She has gone, we hope, to heaven, at the early age of seven
(Funeral starts off at eleven) where she'll nevermore have pain.

The popular songs drizzled death. *Listen to the Mocking Bird* was one of the earliest of the period; *Clementine,* another prime favorite, was harmoniously deceased and interred; little

Nellie queries, *Why Did They Dig Ma's Grave so Deep?* and the nation wept in sympathy; *Abdul Abulbul Ameer* ended in a double killing; *Kafoozalem* does as much. Clear down to the Spanish-American war the strain dominated, *Break the News to Mother* being one of the tearful examples. *The Baggage Coach Ahead* was a prime toast, with its picture of the depressed young man in the train, holding a baby, whose howls annoyed the passengers:

"O where is its mother? Go take it to her,"
One lady then softly said.
"I wish that I could," was the man's sad reply,
"But she's dead in the coach ahead."

As the train rolled onward, a husband sat in tears,
Thinking of the happiness of just a few short years.
Baby's face brings pictures of a cherished hope now dead,
But baby's cries can't awaken her in the baggage coach ahead.

Too late for Big Ben now. There was *The Fatal Wedding:*

The husband died by his own hand
Before the break of day.
No wedding feast that night was spread,
Two graves were made next day,
One for the babe, and in the one
The father soon was laid.

These songs promised a boom for the undertaking profession. Nothing was more popular than Thomas Haynes Bailey's cry:

Tell me the tales which to me were so dear,
Long, long ago, long, long ago;
Sing me the songs I delighted to hear,
Long, long ago, long ago.

There was Will S. Hays's tearful *Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane*, which was nose-to-nose with Stephen Foster in popularity. Lizzie Clark Hardy's *Some Time at Eve* earned its acclaim:

Some time at eve when the tide is low
I shall slip my mooring and sail away,
With no response to the friendly hail
Of kindred craft in the busy bay.
In the silent hush of the twilight pale,
When the night stoops down to embrace the day,
And the voices call in the waters' flow—
Some time at eve when the tide is low
I shall slip my mooring and sail away.

Somebody's Darling, by Marie R. LaCoste, was another lauded sobsong. T. Lloyd Mackey's *Measuring the Baby* was as sentimentally beloved:

Ah me! in a darkened chamber with the sunlight shut away,
Through tears that fell like bitter rain we measured the boy today;
And the dear little feet that were dimpled and sweet as a budding rose
Lay side by side together in the hush of a long repose. . . .

We measured the sleeping baby with ribbons white as snow,
For the shining rosewood casket that waited him below;
And out of the darkened chamber we went with a childless moan;
To the height of the sinless angels our little one had grown.

Carman and Hovey, in their Vagabondia songs, uttered the desire to escape life's intricacy by a return to young simplicity:

Let me taste the old immortal
Indolence of life once more;
Not recalling nor foreseeing,
Let the great slow joys of being
Well my heart through, as of yore.

Bunner, in this echoing hour, phrased this:

Oh, what's the way to Arcady,
To Arcady, to Arcady?
Oh, what's the way to Arcady,
Where all the leaves are merry?

Life, the ticket-agent, responds coldly that there is no train back to that station. But man, unheeding, repeats the query indignantly. . . . Bunner's parody variations on *Home Sweet Home* are magnificent; but they are a clever flight away from the popular theme. Carman, when it came to invoking death, commenced—

When the black horses from the house of Dis,

and continued in the same echoey strain. Thomas Bailey Aldrich fantasied:

Somewhere in desolate wind-swept space—
In Twilight land, in No-Man's land,
Two hurrying shapes met face to face,
And bade each other stand.

"And who are you," cried one agape,
Shuddering in the gloaming light.
"I know not," said the second shape,
"I only died last night."

George Sterling echoed, of death:

Sargon is dust, Semiramis a clod!
In crypts profaned the moon at midnight peers;

true enough; but Whitman's adjuration to American poets would have aided.

Emily Dickinson has much to say upon the subject:

The heart asks pleasure first,
And then, excuse from pain;
And then, those little anodynes

That deaden suffering;
And then, to go to sleep;
And then, if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor,
The liberty to die.

She lauded death superbly:

One dignity delays for all,
One mitred afternoon,
None can avoid this purple,
None evade this crown.

How pomp surpassing ermine,
When simple you and I
Present our meek escutcheon
And claim the rank to die!

She longed for it with tremendous imagination:

'Twas just this time last year I died.
I know I heard the corn,
When I was carried by the farms,—
It had the tassels on.

The popular songs sang the more superficial aspect of the desire to return, at the end of the age: *School Days, Childhood, School Mates, Take Me Back to Babyland.* But the land had not forgotten Elizabeth Akers Allen's *Rock Me to Sleep, Mother,* which went further:

Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight,
Make me a child again, just for tonight!
Mother, come back from the echoless shore,
Take me again to your heart, as of yore.
Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care;
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair;
Over my slumber your loving watch keep—
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

The poet was in far-off Italy when she wrote this. Every soul finds itself, sooner or later, exiled in farther realms. The world was gray around her:

> Backward, flow backward, O tide of the years,
> I am so weary of toil and of tears—
> Toil without recompense, tears all in vain:
> Take them, and give me my childhood again!
> I have grown weary of dust and decay,
> Weary of flinging my soul-wealth away;
> Weary of sowing for others to reap—
> Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

There had been hours when the mother could have heard. Those hours were gone: this is one of life's common sports with us.

> Over my heart, in the days that are flown,
> No love like motherlove ever has shone;
> No other worship abides and endures,
> Faithful, unselfish and patient like yours.
> None like a mother can charm away pain
> From the sick soul and the world-weary brain.
> Slumbers soft, calm, o'er my weary lids creep—
> Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

The wish, unheard but by the singer and the listening world, was for something deeper than the futile dream of childhood's return. There were always the arms of a darker dearer mother:

> Mother, dear mother! the years have been long
> Since last I listened your lullaby song;
> Sing, then, and unto my soul it shall seem
> Womanhood's years have been only a dream;
> Clasped to your heart in a loving embrace,
> With your light lashes just sweeping my face,
> Never hereafter to wake or to sleep—
> Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

My father made an annual event of reading this poem aloud. To us children, it was impressive. We did not know of that echoless shore to which his mother had long gone; and only now, when the last wish has blossomed for him, do we sense what was in his heart. For men dream many things, and wish many things; but there is no stronger wish than this persisting prayer.

The breed of homebred poetic giants was gone; only the soft echoes remained. And their noise was discord. . . .

The Negroes sang food lustily; and dislike of the slave-owning whites as lustily. Opportunity was one of the land's watchwords. The cowboy ballads said that life was hell. Trade was seen as something worse; and the poet's bleak lot worse still. Drink was cried down; the prohibition movement rooted deep in America's song. America reared its popular outlaw hero, a friend of the poor; and the cry of labor mounted up and up, to crest in the resonant *The Man with the Hoe.*

Love, in the Negro song, was a matter of brief tit for tat. Ballad love centered around seduction. There were courtly echoes, and a half century's strife as to whether the double standard of sexual morality—the woman to the gutter, the man to the parlor—was right. Woman began her swift rise to semi-equality with man; and love awoke to jazz.

Family love was stronger than before; with counter-currents of hatred for every member of the family group. Unless a man shall hate his father, his mother, his brothers, his sisters, his wife, his children, he shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of America's heaven. Love broadened to include all humanity, all the universe . . . but patriotism was still strong.

There was little longing for beauty, except implicit in Lanier, and in rare other spots.

The Negro heaven was a needed compensation for hell on earth: and it was a quaint and syncopated place, as progressive as granite. Science was decried, religion uplifted, by backward voices. Poets began to take potshots at God more frequently;

although Christian missions still stood high, and revival hymns appealed to the moronic side of the national nature.

Little longing for wisdom. . . .

But death was utterly desired, by all; and the land loved most the desire to return to childhood, and to the hush before it.

And now awakes a singing hour. . . .



HEAVENS ON TROUBLED EARTH

"In fact, the Future is listed as The Era of Universal Jazz!"

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VII

HEAVENS ON TROUBLED EARTH

BEFORE we cross the vestibule of today's poetry, with its embedded picture of tomorrow's factual developments, let us return for a moment to the theme division of this study. Heaven is the sun of man's desires. Life is compact of desires; the arts, including poetry, phrase these desires. To give us road-guides through the cross-welter of human wishes, we have let the scientists divide the desires for us according to this embracing scheme:

(i) The wishes essential to life: first the preservative wishes, including the desires for food, clothing, shelter, and the like;

(ii) And the reproductive wishes, ranging from direct physical love between the sexes, and eccentric expressions of this,

(iii) To the vaguer loves of parent or of child, of kindred, of countrymen, of men in general, of nature.

(iv) There are, next, the non-essential wishes: first the esthetic ones, seeking beauty;

(v) The emotional or moral wishes, seeking the good, including religion; and—

(vi) The intellectual wishes, desiring facts, wisdom, the truth.

(vii) Lastly, there is the underlying wish of all, the homesick wish for a return to youth, to the uncivilized wilds, to the mother, to the original lifelessness, or death.

Hunger, love, broadened love, the desires for beauty, for good, for wisdom, for death—these are man's wishes, as his poetry phrases them.

The latest—and very unfinished—period of American poetry can be measured, with approximate accuracy, by William Stanley Braithwaite's annual *Anthologies of Magazine Verse*. The first of these appeared in 1913; 1928 appeared this year. Sixteen years. . . . Have there been apparent changes in this brief time?

A word as to technique. There are 47 poems in the first anthology; 498 in the second. Classifying as examples of the new technique, or an approach to it, all poems uttered in direct speech—the speech of practically all the race's great poetry; and as examples of the old, or an approach to it, all poems full of echoes, archaisms, and stock poeticisms, we find: in the 1913 anthology, there are 72% of the poems in the old technique, and 28% in the new; in the 1928 anthology, there are 28% in the old technique, and 72% in the new. The figures are just reversed. The new technique has increased 157% in proportional representation, and 2,763% in actual number included.

There are six poems of poetic distinction in the first book. All are in the new technique. There are 71 in the 1928 volume. All are in the new technique.

Braithwaite is keenly sensitive to the best in our poetry. These figures establish that. He may be over-catholic in his inclusions; but he has shifted his emphasis from echoes to real poetry. He is an admirable anthologist, and his books are indispensable to a grasp of modern poetry.

With four exceptions, no poet appearing in the first anthology appears in its fifteenth descendant. Among the versifiers who have gone into the silences, or are at least dead magazinely, are Bliss Carman, Madison Cawein, Louis V. LeDoux, Richard Le-Gallienne, Joyce Kilmer, Sara Teasdale, Edward J. O'Brien, Louis Untermeyer, John G. Neihardt, Richard Burton, Hermann Hagedorn, Charles Hanson Towne, Amelia Josephine Burr, George Edward Woodberry, Percy Mackaye, George Sterling, Mahlon Leonard Fisher.

That first book includes Vachel Lindsay and Edwin Arlington Robinson. It appeared before hide or hair of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, Amy Lowell, Edgar Lee Masters, had appeared.

These sixteen years saw the inception of the World War, its conduct and ending, and has seen a troubled decade pass since then. Machinery, potent enough as it opened, is the trinity today: radio, airplane, television, talkies, mechanical robots, kelvinators, panotropes, a thousand other inventions, have become commonplaces. We have had a bawling, squalling nursery of poets during this time. . . . Faintly echoing the past, singing the present more loudly, faintly using Einstein and Millikan as springboards. They paint a vehemently disintegrating today, sob for a fantastically unreal yesterday, sturdily limn tomorrow. What is their composite word, as America's word?

Among these singers is Clement Wood. His work will be used with that of the others.

i.

The hunger of the belly differs from the hungers of the heart, the esthetic nature, the emotions, and the mind, in that the body dies without its daily satisfaction: while a desire for a lover, beauty, god, and wisdom may be postponed indefinitely. If one could wait longingly for a ham sandwich as long as Dante waited for Beatrice, we might have a Diviner Comedy with the porkine viand seated on the throne of grace. But the belly demands otherwise; there is little time to spend the energy of this hunger in singing, when a person craves victuals.

Yet even this needs correction. Man does not sustain for months and years his desire for a meal. But he does sustain, often for a lifetime, his desire for financial security that will assure him and his the meals, shelter, and surroundings that he desires. He sings this long desire: and sings too his envy of those who have what he wants; and his determination to wrest from them what he wants.

William Rose Benet jazzes—for much of the tempo of poetry has syncopated itself into ragtime—*Quick Lunch:*

> Clerks crunch a roll or two,
> Pimpled salesmen spread
> Raw mustard on their bread. . . .

"Well, gents, what's yours? . . .
Sling out the sandwich . . . To a group
Of seeming gunmen, "Salad? Hey?"
Then, bawled, "Two French fries on the way! . . .
Naw! Make that *one!*"
Clang, clang . . . "One scrambled . . . *make it two!*
Here y'are, sir! . . . Ye-es, that's Irish stew!"

This study does not deal primarily with humorous topics; and yet prohibition should be mentioned. America's song for a century demanded it; and America got it. This instalment of heaven arrived officially January 16, 1920. Out of it all, Volstead has qualified as Canute's anemic brother; and the bootlegger has become the modern Croesus. Few poets still sing for less liquor; though as late as 1917 Lindsay was chanting *The Drunkard's Funeral:*

That fellow in the coffin led a life most foul,
A fierce defender of the red bartender.
At the church he would rail,
At the preacher he would howl. . . .
He would trade engender for the red bartender,
He would homage render to the red bartender,
And in ultimate surrender to the red bartender
He died of the tremens, as crazy as a loon.

The moral, the conclusion, the verdict, says the poet, repeating it four times, is: "The saloon must go." It went. But the speakeasy is just as convenient.

Arthur Guiterman, with a manly resignation, became one of the light laureates of law-abidingness. Not for him ginger-ale, unfermented grape-juice, seltzer, vanilla soda:

But as for me, my love I toast
In nut-brown Sarsaparilla!

Most of the poets were reasonable. Adjusting their alcohol-wings in the floodtide of suspect liquor, they did not demand more, Don Marquis always excepted.

A long time before, the country had dreamed and sung of a waterway wedding the flanking oceans. It came—another instalment of America's heaven, duly delivered C. O. D. Charles L. O'Donnell, Percy Mackaye and others welcomed it: O'Donnell calling it "the last great wonder of the world"; Mackaye regarding Goethals, the builder, as a poet who wrought with a continent for his theme:

> And the derricks rang his dithyrambs
> And his stanzas roared in steam.

It is so that poems ultimately write themselves.

The unrest of the under dog, speaking humanly, manifested itself throughout America, now that populism and free silver were interred, in labor's own utterance, in spasmodic outspurts toward socialism, anarchy, communism, bolshevism, pacifism, in a tepid social urge, and a mild pseudo-social sympathy that omitted few of the sensitive singers in its epidemic sweep. Arturo Giovanitti spoke as one of labor. He begs labor to use its amorphous mind:

> Aye, think! While breaks in you the dawn,
> Crouched at your feet, the world lies still—
> It has no power but your brawn,
> It knows no wisdom but your will.

The last would be regrettable, if true. He could sing,

> Like the sea's surging roar,
> I hear the sunward march of countless feet.

Unfortunately, this march was usually summoned by the factory whistle.

Lindsay sensed the dull resentment of factory workers, in *Factory Windows Are Always Broken:*

> Somebody's always throwing bricks,
> Somebody's always heaving cinders,
> Playing ugly Yahoo tricks.

Carl Sandburg saw labor from the inside. There is his *Fish Crier*, "terribly glad" of his occupation; there is *Muckers*, inside the bystanders:

> Twenty men stand watching the muckers. . . .
> Driving the blades of their shovels
> Deeper and deeper for the new gas mains. . . .
> Of the twenty looking on,
> Ten murmur, "O, it's a hell of a job,"
> Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job."

James D. Corrothers saw through no rosy glasses the situation of his group:

> To be a Negro in a day like this
> Demands strange loyalty. We serve a flag
> Which is to us white freedom's emphasis.
> Ah! one must love when Truth and Justice lag.

James Weldon Johnson, in *Fifty Years*, stated the situation. Though the land is the Negro's by birth and toil,

> And yet, my brothers, well I know
> The tethered feet, the pinioned wings,
> The spirit bowed beneath the blow,
> The heart grown faint from wounds and stings.

He demands of his land:

> How would you have us, as we are—
> Or sinking 'neath the load we bear? . . .
> Strong, willing sinews in your wings,
> Or tightening chains about your feet?

Claude McKay is more bitter, when he surveys the centuries of oppression of the blacks:

> Then from the dark depths of my soul I cry
> To the avenging angel to consume

The white man's world of wonders utterly;
Let it be swallowed up in earth's vast womb,
Or upward roll as sacrificial smoke,
To liberate my people from its yoke!

Langston Hughes is philosophical:

I've been a slave:
Cæsar told me to keep his doorstep clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington. . . .
I've been a victim:
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me now in Texas.

Countee Cullen is whimsically just, as in *For a Lady I Know:*

She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

Perhaps the most savage vestige left in America is lynching. I know no Southern poet who demands the social relief of this leeching balm for a section's sense of inferiority. There are voices against it. James Weldon Johnson ends his *Brothers* with wisdom:

And now, his fiendish crime has been avenged;
Let us back to our wives and children.—Say,
What did he mean by those last muttered words,
"Brothers in spirit, brothers in deed are we?"

Ridgely Torrence's *The Bird and the Tree* is as thoughtful; William Ellery Leonard's *The Lynching Bee* is more dreadfully specific, with its picture of gelding and holocaust. Claude McKay ends his picture:

Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
The dreadful body swaying in the sun.

The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

America's heaven of tomorrow, if this unanimity is a sign, will end this blazing social cathartic.

To Edwin Arlington Robinson, educated by twenty years of unappreciated great singing, man is a failure. Not the universe, but man. He sang at starting,

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

All of life's hopefulness went, when the former human glory of the local manor house departed. No remedy in the slow upsurge of the crowd. *Richard Cory*, in the same volume, "a gentleman from sole to crown"—"everything to make us wish that we were in his place," says this dynamically:

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Some of his human wreckages are more ghastly than this.

Twenty years passed over his singing, and he is still saying:

We've each a darkening hill to climb.

Cassandra threatens national ruin, for the land's heedlessness. His book-length poems, largely dated back to Arthur's disintegrating hour, trumpet futility as consistently:

I'm glad they tell me there's another world,
For this one's a disease without a doctor.

I have been told so much about this world,
That I have wondered why men stay in it.

If you see what's around us every day,
You need no other showing to go mad.

There is darkness over his Camelot. And it lies between the Gulf and the Lakes, the Gulf Stream and the Kuro Shiwo.

Robert Frost, unheard as long, is no more cheerful in his verdict:

The melancholy of having to count souls
Where they grow fewer and fewer every year
Is extreme where they shrink to none at all.
It must be I want life to go on living.

He is not even certain about this last. Edgar Lee Masters, whose first volumes earned the silence that greeted them, sees much around him to disapprove of. There is journalism—the reporter speaking to his momentary mistress:

I am worse than you:
I poison minds with thoughts they take as good,
I drug an era, make it foul or dull.

To him, "the Great Race is passing," to be replaced by nitwits, Crackers and Negroes, Methodists and prohibitionists, mongrels and pigmies. The average man's life consists in a dream deferred by daily practical considerations, so that he ends with the dream unfulfilled. He sees cleanly:

I know a worse thing than a German king;
It is the social scourge of poverty,
Which cripples, slays the husband and the wife,
And sends the children forth in life half-formed.

His impressive *Domesday Book* finds America—

Corrupt, deceived, deceiving, self-deceived,
Half-disciplined, half-lettered, crude and smart, . . .
Cowardly, shabby, hypocritical.

Not too pleasant a photograph.

Carl Sandburg boisterously accepted life's hectic mixture. He granted the wickedness and brutality of his Chicago, but exulted in its life, coarseness, strength, cunning, youthfulness. . . . He greets the machine age without regret, as in this *New Farm Tractor:*

Snub nose, the guts of twenty mules are in your cylinders and transmission.
The rear axles hold the kick of twenty Missouri jackasses.

He has the steel pray:

Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.

His *Good Morning, America* says this even more emphatically. Samuel A. DeWitt has wisdom to utter for *An Old Tin Can:*

There was a time when you were whole
And full; and yet were less,
In the fine measure of a soul,
Than you are now in emptiness.

Ah! Then you sat upon a shelf
With others like you, trim and nice;
But then you did not own yourself,
And then you had a price.

Labor poets saw labor's lot passionately. Thus May Beals,

Comrades, stretched and bound
In agony on labor's rock, we live—
And die—to fatten vultures!

James Oppenheim was no accepter: he could not believe that civilization meant merely to invent a new breakfast food, to devise a new dance, to contrive a swifter automobile. Out of the age, whose tempo he gathers from a day's scare headlines:

> This is an excellent age for insurrection, revolt, and the reddest of revolutions.

Louis Untermeyer, in *Landscapes*, sees green woodland beauty yielding:

> The roaring avenues, the shrieking mills;
> Brothels and prisons on these kindly hills. . . .
> And then the city, like a hideous sore.
> *Good God, and what is all this beauty for?*

Still another Jewish poet, David George Plotkin, in *Ghetto Gutters*, more brilliantly indicts the life around him. Here is his *Tenement Mothers*, with the warring world for a backdrop:

> The skies rain death. . . .
> Blackness . . . engulfs millions of men. . . .
> Cities, gods, empires,
> Reel to their doom. . . .
> Mrs. Murphy is peeling potatoes,
> And singing "The Sidewalks of New York."
> Mrs. Szbxyski is receiving a visit from the stork. . . .
> Mrs. Buzzi is stuffing Tony with spaghetti
> And patching the seat of his trousers.

His is an aloof soul, seeing the comedy of man. His *Autobiography*, starting his man as "Series K. No. 974,381, Top row on the right;" carrying him to the war as "332,465, Front row of trenches"; then to Sing Sing, "4758, Front row of cells on the left"; to return at the end of his sentence to the first regimented number, is bitterly brilliant.

To counteract this cynicism, there are sporadic outcroppings of localistic pride. Alice McGuigan, in *Without a Fig Leaf*, sings to her natal commonwealth:

In this Union, we are second, Arkansaw,
Alphabetically reckoned, Arkansaw;
We have corn and sweet potatoes,
Big red apples and tomatoes;
All the gifts earth yields await us,
In Arkansaw.

Franklin P. Adams sees the w. k. cosmos less optimistically, in *For the Other 364 Days*, which revive the battle, the competition, the abolition of all sentiment and scrupulosity:

Frenzy yourself into sickness and dizziness—
Christmas is over and Business is Business.

Samuel Hoffenstein, the glittering author of poems in dispraise of practically everything, gently chants the altered American landscape, with Texaco disputing the rights of willow trees, Mobiloil neighboring marigolds, robins singing "Socony," and the sky bright with "Sweet Caporal." One of his major musics includes:

Your life's a wreck; you're tired of living,
Of lending, spending, borrowing, giving;
Of doubt and fear, of hope and question,
Of women, children and digestion;
There isn't a single dream you cherish—
You simply pine and pray to perish.
You haven't the nerve to take bichloride,
But you stay up nights till you're gaunt and sore-eyed;
You don't eat greens, as the doctors tell you,
And you drink the very worst they sell you;
You've earned, at least, let's say, cirrhosis—
And what do you get for it? Halitosis!

Modern pessimism makes the poet see even the rioting vigor of spring as a self-portrait. Thus Leonora Speyer:

Spring, sitting there in your green cloak,
You are a gray-haired woman,

You are as old as I,
As sad,
As tired.

But this is overdone a trifle. Josephine Johnson sees in life only:

The need of greater courage still for facing
Monotony.

Monotony is about as necessary a human blight as chilblains in Haiti. Ethel Romig Fuller is as cheerful as a weeper sapajou, her *Winter Orchard* seeing no difference between the wormy unsound apples on the ground, and the unblemished ones on the limb:

And where is choice in either lot?—
The saints dry up; the sinners rot.

Gloria Goddard, in her bleak *Smoke*, surveys life glumly:

On, on we go in our screaming zeal,
Gathering wealth and fame and place,
To rise at last in a funeral pyre,
Which will limn the far eternal ages
With a trail of
Smoke.

Her magnificent *Speed* welcomes the machine age, with its apostrophe to automobile travel:

Two rapier lights
Thrust swiftly over the crest of the hill. . . .
The brilliant death leers by,
We sink between the breasted hills. . . .
And stream with the hurtling wind.

On—On—
Shrinking Time to that gnat worry
Men call seconds. . . .
On—On—

My *Culture* pictures the great weathered tree upon the crest, unmoved by heat and storm and darkness:

> And they will fell it, shrivel it,
> In cold mechanic rage,
> That its bleached flesh and bones may bear
> These words, upon this page.

Ahriman shows the ugly town's victory over the green:

> And all the green has grown to murdered brown.
> There is no darkness like the stricken shade
> That man has made.

The Dodo and the Ginkgo Tree pictures the descendants of the vigorous former human greatness of America, as—

> Gaunt, gone to seed, misfitted in
> An ailing superintendence.

The sonnet *Progress* balances the past against the present insistently:

> Tall columns like gray snow against the green:
> *A locomotive screaming over a crossing.*
> The owl, the snaky locks, in brooding stone:
> *A steam-derrick in agonized creaking and hissing. . . .*
> A pyramid frozen toward its star:
> *Whirr of metallic birds lifting and roaring.*
> Endless dull sand, where footprints never were:
> *Square-windowed towers heavenward endlessly sneering.*
> Light-hearted men, saddened, dying, dead.
> *Light-hearted men, saddened, dying, dead.*

Lee Wilson Dodd's *Publicity* is the most recent survey of what America has become. Little escapes keen eye and Popian pen:

> While furious propaganda, with her brand,
> Fires the dry prairies of our wide Waste Land;

Making the Earth, man's temporal station, be
One stinking altar to Publicity.
Touts from the housetops bawl their wares abroad,
From Sex to Service, Cigarettes to God. . . .
While, crowding through dull booths for trade designed,
All dead to Shame, and moribund to mind,
Science and Art turn mountebanks and shriek
"This way for Beauty! Truth is cheap this week!"

From the steps of the Parthenon I have seen Spearmint and Kolynos ads; on the sides of Stamboul mosques, Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo blurbs; obscuring a Cairo view of the pyramids, flaunts of Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and Pluto Water: the scenic beauty of five continents blurred and blared away by American billboards. This conquest of the world by Rotary still needs a laureate. Dodd is not wrong.

While he sees the people's wallets go into some Bandit-Banker's possession, and transmogrified into Capital, controlled by Few:

Not, mark you, that I deem our fate unjust,
For Indolence is lawful prey to Lust.

This is wisdom. James Oppenheim had already pointed out, in *The Slave*, that slaves could not be set free: and that free men set themselves free. Man's evils are self-willed, and will end when he wills their end. Dodd goes on to see America's gods as Self, and Success. Both are worthy goals; but both need thorough redefinition.

This is the poets' survey. What is their suggestion?

Here are the extreme sensitives, the modernists. Some of them are eccentrics who are unwilling to wait for the normal growth of the poet's name, and seek to hothouse the delicate flower by being different, even at the cost of sounding insane. Some of them, moved by an inner intuition or by an intellectual response to the studies of Freud and the psychoanalysts, sought to reproduce the contents of the stream of consciousness, rather than to report the patly shaped resultants of this stream. The first we could ignore, if we could identify them: the second group might, in their fidelity to the great breeding-ground of wishes, sense

faintly tomorrow's development. But we cannot in advance distinguish them: we must give both an inning.

The common cause of today's embracing iconoclasm in all the arts is not too hidden. Civilized life was hastily hothoused into a modern life in all ways different from the staider, more stolid existence that sagged into Victorian placidity. Daily life changed; this altered ideals; and the arts, including poetry, which continued to reflect the ideals of a vanished placidity meant nothing to dwellers in the hectic new air, and demanded ruthless usurpers. Modern psychology has established that each of us holds, in the unconscious, a jungle of desires long held lawless, which writhe toward expression, and largely motivate acts apparently drab and inexplicable. Emotions are not logical: they want. Emotions are not systematic: they stampede. Give a poet —that is, a sensitive impelled by exhibitionism into self-expression—the knowledge that all these beasts rage within, and it is a certainty that certain of the most sensitive are sure to open the menagerie to the public, or at least to attempt to do this.

We may discard explanations given by these emotional modernists, and their emotional apologists—such as that the modernist words are self-sufficient magic in themselves, instead of being evocative, as all words are. Words are conventionalized sound-symbols, to express differentiating meanings: they are not creators, but evokers. Nor have the modernists created a new language, as some claim. A new language would speak only to the individual who created it, or the group who accepted it: and the second element has not been located yet. Such explanations are no more helpful than a microscope to a blind man.

The one tenable possibility is that these modernists seek to reproduce the contents of a stream of consciousness. Let us take a few of the most touted examples. There is Mina Loy:

> Spawn of fantasies
> Sitting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage.

And Marianne Moore:

There is a certain amount of poetry in unconscious
Fastidiousness. Certain Ming
Products, imperial floor coverings of coach
Wheel yellow, are well enough in their way.

There is Walter Conrad Arensberg—and all these writers appear in even sedate anthologies:

Ing? Is it possible to mean ing?
Suppose
for the termination in *g*
a disoriented
series
of the simple fractures
in sleep
Soporific
has accordingly a value for soap
so present to
sew pieces.
And *p* says: Peace is.

There is T. S. Eliot, a belled wether of the group. Every ecstatic adjective in the latest lexicon greeted his opus, *The Waste Land*, which reached this summit:

London bridge is falling down falling down falling down.
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

including quotations from *Mother Goose*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, various *Upanishads*, and other sources. And there is E. E. Cummings, Gog to Eliot's Magog, observing:

life hurl my
yes, crumbles hand (ful released conaferetti) ev eryflitter,
inga, where
mil(lions of aslickf)litter ing brightmillion ofS hurl;
edindodg:ing. . . .

a: crimbflitteringish is arefloatsis ingfallal! mil, shy
milbrightlions
my (hurl flicker handful
in) dodging are shybrigHteyes is crum bs (allll) ifm ey Es

These outstanding figures, these representative quotations, may represent as well William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and a score more.

Do they represent the stream of consciousness, so that it may be identified by the reader as a possible picture of his own fluidic consciousness, as embodying his amorphous wishes? Unfortunately for the ultimate value of these singers' words, no. The consciousness does not work this way. Mine does not; I can only assume that the reader's does not. The stream of consciousness does not work like the polished brilliance of an Edwin Arlington Robinson poem; neither does it match these bethlehem products. It may be irreducible to words; it is certainly not reduced to words in the quotations above.

These are, of course, clinical exhibits, from which the wishfulfilments of the singers may be interpreted. But thus can not be called an art product: and the wishes expressed are so hashed, so precious, so ungeneral, that they are unimportant in this survey of America's past, her present, and her future.

Edna St. Vincent Millay senses that something is wrong, and singingly turns her back on it:

> Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
> No matter where it's going.

The wanderlust, to leave this place anyhow. She sees herself as a child of misblent cultures, as America is:

> After all's said and after all's done,
> What should I be but a harlot and a nun?

Elinor Wylie more insistently knew what she wanted. Her advice was, "Shun the polluted flock": live like the lonely eagle, or the underground mole,

> And there hold intercourse
> With roots of trees and stones,
> With rivers at their source,
> And disembodied bones,

none of which would aid in making up an acceptable bridge foursome. She could smile quietly at the menacing years: none merited her fear.

Amy Lowell, born with a set of flat silver in her mouth, was entirely unsympathetic to social suffering. She heard the yelpings and mutterings of—

> People who care more for bread than beauty. . . .
> Fools! It is always the dead who breed,

and not the living. Revolt, to her, meant melting bronze church bells to make a stem "for a banner gorged with blood," and mobs ripping dead bishops out of their tombs. Well, kings and popes did this once: it will be no novelty.

Masters saw democracy as a despot, "amid the idiot millions who command": "Rule us you cannot, though you rule the land." Robinson saw no hope except in a leadership amounting to aristocracy: "For the few shall save the many, or the many are to fall." Arturo Giovanitti saw otherwise. When a newsboy sees the rich woman snuggling a little bitch to her breast, he wants to be the dog—not to be grateful to the mistress, but—"No, damn you, no, I would tear her nose off." He pictures actual revolutions of the past, downing the castle and the crucifix, as ending with Revolution—

> Behold! she lay there naked, lewd,
> A drunken harlot of the street,
>
> With withered breasts and shaggy hair,
> Soiled by each wanton frothy kiss,
> Between a sergeant of police
> And a decrepit millionaire.

He utters his own *Sermon on the Common*, including "Blessed are the rebels; for they shall reconquer the earth." Labor says to its exploiters,

> "You drove our babes to starve, the strong to drink,
> The weak to beg, our famished girls to fill
> The charnels of your stews, our sons to kill
> For bread and work . . . and all of us to think!"

The dazzling shaft "of light, of truth, to save and to redeem," will come, he says:

> And—whether Love or Dynamite—
> Shall blaze the pathway to your dream.

He is too wise to hazard a guess as to which method man will elect.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood, a fine old radical of the Pacific Coast, in *The Poet in the Desert*, utters wisdom:

> The death of the soul is authority.
> None is fit to govern another.
> Self choice is best, even though it blunder.

Every man his own legislature—one of the slogans of tomorrow.

> Respectability, a cloak to cover the coward.
> To be respectable is to be contemptible.

A far shout, this, from Griswold's seeing respectability as heaven. Whoever takes what he has not earned, says C. E. S. Wood, is a robber; the legislator, spinning the spider-laws which enweb labor, is more accursed than the sword-wielding pirate.

> Oh, Revolution, dread angel of the Awful Presence, . . .
> Open and set the captives free. . . .
> You are our only hope, our only redeemer.

In *God and the Strong Ones* Margaret Widdemer lifts a vigorous chant:

"They will trample us and bind!" said the Strong Ones;
"We are crushed beneath the blackened feet and hands;
All the strong and fair and great they will crush from out the state;
They will whelm it with the weight of pressing sands.
They are maddened and are blind!" said the Strong Ones,
"Black decay has come where they have trod.
They will break the world in twain if their hands are on the rein—"
"What is that to me?" saith God.

The former bullies are then reminded that these are the harvests of their injustices.

Samuel A. DeWitt, the only American poet to be expelled from a state legislature for his economic beliefs, addressed Speaker Thaddeus C. Sweet of the New York State Assembly in memorable words:

For what you did and what you said
Farmers dropped their scythes and bled;
And for the puppets in round rows
Bare feet trod the olden snows—
Feet that wrote for tyrant George
A bleeding print at Valley Forge;
And you forget that there are men
Glad to march that way again.

An anonymous Paint Creek miner, during the strike of 1911-1912, prays for the coming of the springtime: so that the shelter of the leaves will permit the strikers to pick off the murderous company gunmen at will. Adolf Wolff, a periodic anarchist, grew expectorative in his ire:

I spit upon the laws that thieves have made
To give the crooked strength to rob the weak. . . .

Upon this whole damned system do I spit,
And, while I spit—I weep.

We hardly go with the critic Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff, when she says that the foregoing conclusion combines the austerity of a Nietzsche, the majesty of a Whitman, and the tender sublimity of a Christ.

Here is Samuel Roth, his feet in the Ghetto, and the rest of his body dreaming of Ashtoreth's courtyard and the clouds above Everest, warning the Versailles peace commissioners:

You will give the workers their rights?

Not shorter hours, greater remuneration, better labor conditions, will satisfy labor:

The workers are swine—like yourselves.
They will have everything or nothing!

Carl Sandburg is bitter as to the persecution of radicals:

> If any fool, babbler, gabby mouth, stand up and say: Let us make a civilization where the sacred and beautiful things of toil and genius shall last . . . tie a can on him—lock him up in Leavenworth—shackle him in the Atlanta hoosegow— . . . slew him in as a lifer at San Quentin. . . . It is the law all dirty wild dreamers die first—gag 'em, lock 'em up, get 'em bumped off.

Out of this clashing tumult, Georgia Douglas Johnson utters cool wisdom:

Long have I beat with timid hands upon life's leaden door,
Praying the patient futile prayers my fathers prayed before,
Yet I remain without the close, unheeded and unheard,
And never to my listening ear is borne the waited word.
Soft o'er the threshold of the years there comes this counsel cool:
The strong demand, contend, prevail: the beggar is a fool!

Vachel Lindsay saw democracy's coming with a Mona Lisa expression:

I will blow the proud folk low,
Humanize the dour and slow,
I will shake the proud folk down,
(Listen to the lion roar!)
Popcorn crowds shall rule the town. . . .
Steam shall work melodiously,
Brotherhood increase,
You'll see the world and all it holds
For fifty cents apiece. . . .
I am the gutter dream, . . .
Singing science, singing steam. . . .
I am the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope,
Tooting hope, tooting hope, tooting hope, tooting hope.

Masters is less vociferous and more thoughtful:

I have a vision, Coroner
Of a new Republic, brighter than the sun,
A new race, loftier faith, this land of ours
Made over as to people, boys and girls,
Conserved like forests. . . . Enough of war,
And billions for the flag—all well enough!
Some billions now to make democracy
Democracy in truth with us, and life
Not helter-skelter, hitting as it may.

Samuel Roth is not quite so optimistic:

But don't worry;
When women will have entirely lost their luster
They will grow the bigger, milkier breasts for the feeding of
greedy sucklings,
And when men will have finally lowered their heads
Their toes will spread out, their backbones will broaden;
Only
There will be no one to milk or ride the silly beasts.

In *Green Leaves*, this writer sang the last picture—

> And when man's hand hast lost its cunning,
> In some unguessed untimed disaster,
> He shall lie and see the slow serene
> Onward march of the army of green—
> See soil and sky, and nothing between
> But the endless sweep of the joyous green.

ii.

We left love last in a soft romantic mood: and that mood commences this hectic period. Sara Teasdale moved most in this mood:

> Pierrot plays in the garden,
> And all the roses know
> That Pierrot loves his music,
> But I love Pierrot.

After death, the poet says,

> I shall have peace, as leafy trees are peaceful
> When rain bends down the bough,
> And I shall be more silent and cold-hearted
> Than you are now.

She even envies "the girls who ask for love In the lights of Union Square," the square so long consecrated to purchased unions.

Vachel Lindsay, ever a singing Don Quixote, lifted his hymns against the white slave traffic, which has already wilted in America. John Hall Wheelock, extensive singer of the theme, sought to be passive in the love-embrace:

> I wish she would bend her head
> And red lips over my throat,
> And rise up, and leave me dead!

He addresses the earth as his mother, his bride—a mundane Jocasta, and rises through rich music to:

> All this little self, this me. . . .
> Rendered up in ecstasy! . . .
> In divine oblivion
> One with the beloved one!

The true mystic, in love with the earth's self. With woman, he indicates, fate has given him a rough deal, making him miss his real love by a few centuries.

Margaret Widdemer touched the tender stops of various quills, ranging from—

> Carnations and my first love! And he was seventeen,
> And I was only twelve years—a stately gulf between!

She sings of an early love that put her by, and later died: yet leaving her with no will to flaunt the rose where the bud had been despised. She promises modernity in love; but, all uncertain, queries, "Will you love me still?"

Robinson themes his four longest poems upon adultery, with wreckage as the result. The destination could have been foretold; but his preoccupation with the theme is a bit obscure. The lady he loved seems to have had cloven feet. Although he never married, he catches the note of marital quarrels in *The Clinging Vine* and *London Bridge:* love has grown cold, and that's an end on't. The average marriage needs a large and efficient central heating system.

James Oppenheim wrote *Songs for the New Age* at about the time his first marriage ended. He urged,

> Where love once was, let there be no hate.

His diagnosis was accurate:

> No, kisses are become to them a routine and a duty;
> They find each other's bodies at midnight as they find breakfast in the morning.

This poet was critical toward clinging love:

Push off the clinging arms!
There is only death in this strangle-hold; even if we call it love.

This applies to mother-child love, as well as husband-wife love, he says. There is a time for clinging, and a time for putting aside clinging; and there is a time for reclinging, entitled to its centuries in the sun. Oppenheim wants *A Woman for the Adventure.*

And my demands are monstrous, never to be met.

He itemizes a body somewhat like an improved Venus de Milo; a mother, when he has the slumping blues; a hiking Girl Scout; and a father to his writings: quite a lot to expect in one woman. In *The Book of Self* he calls attention to the altered posture of mating, which Haldane calls man's most important biological invention. In *The Golden Bird* he discovers at last a beloved, who more than meets his specifications.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood is the laureate of bastards:

I will sing a song of Bastards. . . .
Beloved of great Nature, . . .
She has not delayed your coming for a priest's incantation.

Witter Bynner, like Wheelock, Miss Teasdale, and others, elected a love that spelt unfulfilment. He sang:

Locate your love, you lose your love;
Find her, you look away. . . .
Though mine I never quite discern,
I trace her every day.

And a poem phrases a wish. Against this soft romanticism is the realism of Sandburg, who saw marriage as no blue ribbon:

I wish to God I never saw you, Mag. . . .
I wish we never bought a license and a white dress
For you to get married in. . . .

I wish the kids had never come
And rent and coal and clothes to pay for
And a grocery man calling for cash
Every day cash for beans and prunes.

A whore profiteth nothing, if his song is accurate: "For all her hustlin'," her cadet or the cop gets it. The manufacture of prostitutes is traced to wages of cash girls at six dollars a week: after a night of it,

And when she pulls on her stockings in the morning she is reckless about God and the newspapers and the police, the talk of her home town or the name people call her.

Elinor Wylie was not receptive toward love. "Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones," she sang, she hated its richness: and at the end she rejected love's reciprocity:

I fear him to the bone;
I lie alone
By the beloved one,
And . . . erect defense
Against love's violence.

Leonora Speyer loved more femininely. She welcomed the pain of rejection after satiety, as in *The Ladder*, with her beloved climbing rung by rung up women's bodies:

You climbed, sure-footed, naked rung by rung,
Clasped them and trod them, called them by their name,
And my name too I heard you speak at last;
You stood upon my breast the while and flung
A hand up to the next! And then—oh shame—
I kissed the foot that bruised me as it passed.

Stephen Vincent Benet, in *King David*, retells adultery jollily. Joseph Auslander, in his verse, qualified as an ardent wooer: singing—

The scent
Of skin as delicate as wild white grapes;

The agitated breath; hair that escapes
In tawny whispers,

and all the ecstatic rest of it. Babette Deutsch is lonely at an unusual time:

But I have known no loneliness like this,
Locked in your arms and bent beneath your kiss.

A fine word on prostitutes is said by William Griffith, in *Magdalen:* the double standard attitude, in which "the Town" holds up the prostitute, lest it should drown; that is, uses her lack of virtue as a pretended shield for the chastity of the virtuous. Jessie Rittenhouse, an ample love laureate, is in the soft romantic mood: And yet the old dull thought would stay,

And all my heart benumb—
If you were but a mile away
You would not come.

Genevieve Taggard, in *Marriage,* restates Miss Deutsch's mood of loneliness: "We are apart," she says: now—

There is no river, there is no sun,
Only an old vow.

In *The Quiet Woman* she repels love. This volume of denials is perversely entitled *For Eager Lovers.* She gently pleads for female promiscuity; we will come to a greater laureate of this soon. Louise Bogan puts her worst foot forward: "Love me because I am lost." Her face, she says, is "a ravaged terrible place." Gladys Oakes, whose verse is redolent of the shockers of the nineties, is anti-marriage. To her mate, she queries, "Why do we violate ourselves again?"

Samuel Roth surges with a desire for fatherhood—a new note:

When I see a pretty hand
I am not the one to strike it.
At a pretty foot, I stand
Eager to produce one like it.

America still surged with optimism.

James Weldon Johnson, in *The White Witch,* wrote obscurely of a custom now happily grown infrequent. Langston Hughes chanted a blues:

> Put on yo' red silk stockings,
> Black gal.
> Go out an' let dem white boys
> Look at yo' legs. . . .
> An' tomorrow's chile'll
> Be a high yaller.

Still socially dubious, this mood found small utterance in the age's song. An angle of it appears in Clifford Gessler's ardent laudation of tropical love:

Come, my lehua bud! . . .
Comfort my forehead against the cool gourd of your body.
Caress me as the sea waves caress, O my mantle of bright feathers!

He has the missionary's son throb with love for two Chinese maids at the same time: "Both have set me aflame."

Samuel Hoffenstein, the city's wit, sees love and marriage without any eyelids at all:

> I yodel a bachelor life;
> I sing of the joys of the single;
> I scoff at a man with a wife,
> And laugh at the thought that they mingle.
>
> I am free of the fear of the wed
> (For the female's capricious in temper)
> That, at last, the inviolate bed
> Will enact the familiar *sic semper.*

The popular songs jazz up the love motif. The land, as they reveal, has become liberal. Mammy songs, back to youth songs, propriety songs—these still survive:

Too many parties and too many pals
May break your heart some day.

Not to speak of *Cheating on Me,* and *You Won't See Me if I See You with Anybody Else at All.* But the usual mood is different:

Who's kissable, who's lovable, Miss Annabel Lee.
Ain't she a pretty baby, what I would do!
Escorting her, supporting her—
Don't forget that she's exclusive.

Only the title is by Edgar Allan Poe. No idea of a wedding ring. . . . Here's the boosting *Let's Do It,* with its simple nature notes:

The dragonflies in those reeds do it,
Sentimental centipedes do it,
Let's do it, let's fall in love! . . .
The birds in trees do it, bees do it,
Even over-educated fleas do it,
Let's do it, let's fall in love!

My Handy Man, Ethel Waters' vehicle, is far broader—and naughtily delicious. It is the age of Red Hot Mammas and Sugar Daddies, of Flaming Youth and Flopping Morals. The old pagan love of love has come back: and Everybody's Doing It.

Gloria Goddard projects that impulse out to nature, as in *A Sycamore in Spring:*

Naked and unabashed, you wait on the hilltop,
Flaunting your uxorious want. . . .
You wait for the spring wind
To quicken you with its throbbing kiss,
To tumble you
To ripe leaf and riper fruit.

She sings no discord in love and marriage:

On the stair behind me, a footfall. . . .
My heart leaps high in answer.
My king strides his imperial way;
My slim steps follow, meet, and match his stride,
And together we go down the world.

John V. A. Weaver is more cynical:

It is some lie that under a windswept tree,
Touching your lips, I touched my vanished youth,
And found again a young, new ecstasy.
It is a lie, I say. This—this is Truth!
Now—I shall rest. For youth and you are gone.
Tomorrow I shall put my flannels on.

But his word *To Youth* sexaphones forth the dominant urge:

This I say to you.
Be arrogant! Be true!
True to April lust that sings
Through your veins. . . .
Now, while life is raw and new,
Drink it clear, drink it deep! . . .
Arms are soft, breasts are white,
Magic's in the April night.

Promiscuity has its singers. Thus J. U. Nicolson tabulates,

Though I have loved a hundred girls,
I loved a harlot best of all.

Robert L. Wolf has his own pet variation:

Lost in a labyrinth of gentle limbs,
I faint between two girls with honey thighs.

We have had certain critics of marriage; but Louis Untermeyer is the laureate of the marital squabble. Out of passionate love beginnings, he has his lovers realize:

They . . . were now bound with malignant fetters.

Their love, once like a fire, had burnt itself out. *A Marriage* means a "war with weapons never understood." He describes his mate:

> Can this be you, this harsh, contemptuous thing,
> Loveless and loathsome? . . .
> You will have one thing only and no other,
> And even that seems hopeless and defiled.

He speaks of his lively brain, his mate's lovely body:

> It almost makes me wonder why
> She hasn't any mind at all.

Has he any remedy for this interminable bickering? He asks:

> Is it a tribute or betrayal when,
> Turning from all the sweet, accustomed ways,
> I leave your lips and eyes to seek you in
> Some other face?

There is no hint that he favors a single standard of morality, in this gipsying. This picture of marriage is true of many, no doubt of that. But it is not a crown: it is a disease. These songs are at best a diagnosis. Washtubs need not be placed in the living room, no matter how much dirty linen accumulates. If this please the poet, and phrase somehow his wish, it is his right to utter it so extensively: but we need not read it.

So far, down the stretch from Indian and English poetry to this centrifugal hour, we have found love sung primarily as a relationship between man and woman. The love desire, and its fulfilment, assumes other forms. Man, like all life, desires in all directions, and seeks satisfaction in all directions. Love develops, in each of us, from self-love in babyhood, through love of the same sex, to the normal love of the opposite sex, the crest of the process.

It is not necessary to use a microscope to find the first in poetry. It is as prevalent as sneezes in January. The poet who hates himself or herself is as rare as a billionaire. Poets who extol their bodies are of this type. All of us hold some hangover of this mood; and it is helpful. But the person who stops with this stage in love growth is like an oak that never leaves its acorn. It is as sterile as the Sahara, as unprogressive as voodooism.

Love of one's own sex is an adolescent stage, which should be passed through as an express train passes a local station. At times it is not. It is sterile; it is not essentially socially harmful. When love slows down and pauses at this stage, or backslides from the third stage into it, the poets singing this can not be tongues for the crowd in love; they only speak for the limited group who have apartments in this blind alley. At times the same person wanders from one stage to another, with a dwelling in each. Sappho would probably fall into the tale of these two cities; and so would some of the modern singers of Lesbian or Socratic tendencies.

Such a poem as Rose O'Neill's *Faun-Taken* is a lovely singing of wild love for man:

> Let me but once look back again and pass.
> Once only see him again—and groan and go—
> The lips that laugh in the grass—
> That kiss in a way one must not know!

The Seven Farewells is an inclusive singing of the same mood. But this is not the only love she sings. Her book is entitled *The Master-Mistress*, from a phrase in a Shakespearean sonnet; and she uses the word as he used it. In one poem she links herself with Sappho. She sings to a woman,

> When all the forge-fires of the day expire,
> I put on you, my love, as silk attire.

She makes a banquet of this beloved: she hymns her breasts,

Like two little hills
Where the snow-drift lies,

and more than her breasts.

Let it be made clear that there should be no social condemnation of this mood. It is as natural as sunrise or rain. In normal love growth, noon and clear weather follow and persist. With some, sunrise and rain remain. And let one other thing be made clear of this mood: it may remain, for a lifetime, a mood, and that only.

Amy Lowell, in her first book, uttered her unsatisfied longing for love, in that she had—

the curse
That never shall I be fulfilled in love.

The poet was not beautiful, in a feminine way; which may have played its part in her tendency. Her tastes were masculine; usually in her poems she refers to herself as a boy or a man. In her poetry, she is at times the passionate male wooer:

So give: ripe fruit must shrivel or fall.
As you are mine, Sweetheart, give all!

Adultery was one of her major themes. *Aubade* gives her constant mood toward some woman she loved:

As I would free the white almond from the green husk
So would I strip your trappings off,
Beloved.
And fingering the smooth and polished kernel
I should see that in my hands glittered a gem beyond counting.

It is possible to read some of the poems more abstractedly. Her favored *Patterns*, as well as *Appuldurcombe Park* and other poems, are themed on unfulfilled love. The group *Two Speak Together* is a long series of love poems to a woman.

You stand between the cedars and the green spruces,
Brilliantly naked. . . .
My hands are flames seeking you.

Later books hold strange half-mad fantasies of unconsummated love between the sexes. In *The Sisters* Sappho is addressed, as well as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Dickinson. The poem ends,

> I understand you all, for in myself,—
> Is that presumption? Yet indeed it's true—
> We are one family. And still my answer
> Will not be any one of yours, I see.

These three represented, in love, love of both sexes, or of women exclusively; monogamy; and continence. This poet found some other answer—to keep the mood a mood, or something else. As an expression of her period, she is highly significant. She is a roadsign to one of the byways that the many avoid.

George Sylvester Viereck, who loomed large at the beginning of the period, rebelled against Victorianism in audacious cloaked verse. He sang the bagnio, with homosexual youths, unclothed passion. But his idiom was not modern, for all of his prophetic liberality of treatment. Conrad Aiken hymned seduction, sadism, cruelty, necrophilia or love of the dead, and many other eccentric expressions of love. But, for all of the melting music in which these are treated, they do not surge with energy or passion.

Edgar Lee Masters achieved a best seller in *The Spoon River Anthology*. It is more than a treatment of death: its deaths at times stream out of lives garbled by most of the eccentric aspects of the love desire. It hints an oncoming liberality of mood:

> Well now, let me ask you,
> If . . . the fathers and mothers had been given their freedom
> To live and enjoy, change mates if they wished,
> Do you think that Spoon River
> Had been any the worse?

Ten years later *The New Spoon River* appeared, and made no such dent in popular favor. It was longer, more abstract, less themed on sex; in spite of one astounding line,

An honest whore's the noblest work of God,

which appears puerile. Continence is going out of fashion:

> I could name you twenty women in this graveyard, . . .
> Who secretly and without the consent of the county clerk
> Gave up their virginity,
> The same as they shed their baby teeth,
> And not many years afterward.

Prostitution, he shrewdly observes, has become useless, with the intimate association of men and women in "equal rights."

In other volumes Masters deals with unusual love-attitudes. Little light, little beauty, little passion, as a rule: but descriptively he covers much, and exhibits the land's growing eccentricities.

No one can accuse Robinson Jeffers of lack of passion. He pulses over with it. The volume *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems* involves such themes as female nudity before men; varied incest; promiscuity on a low plane—

> I shared your luck when you lost; you lost *me* once,
> Johnny, remember? Tom Dell had me two nights
> Here in the house;

a theme repeated in Clytemnestra's hot appeal to the soldiers; and a woman's love of the great roan stallion, in the passionate poem of that name. This strain of bestiality appears elsewhere.

Is Jeffers another Aeschylus, as his admirers assert; or is there some dryrot in this spilth of eccentric passion? The material for the Clytemnestra story he retells comes from the Greeks; but they handled it with artistic restraint, not with staccatoed realism. Survey the tendency of these poems, for a moment. Out of the bestiality we have husband-murder and beast-murder. Tamar has her brother murder the man she has seduced, and aids in burning to death her brother, her father, and several relatives. In the second volume, the half-mad preacher forces his daughter, preaches madly an end to all civilization, and in the end sees his daughter kill herself.

In other words, the wages of vagrant love is death.

Sex and love are not normally such bloody businesses. This poet so sees them, which means, so wishes them: this is his sickness. A world full of such people as Jeffers describes would end itself in a generation. The outlook is unhealthy.

The poetry is significant, as revealing the attitude of an isolated warped personality. It is more significant, when we consider the noisy limited acclaim that greeted it. If this acclaim grows general, it will be an evidence of Puritanic suppression so vast, that only blood can wipe out the bottled desires. There is no normal living in it.

We come closer to the normal in *The Wild Party*, by Joseph Moncure March, a brilliantly colloquial tale in verse, packed with drama. The story opens with Queenie:

> Her legs were built to drive men mad.
> And she did.
> She would skid.
> But sooner or later they bored her.
> Sixteen a year was her order.

She liked her lovers "violent and vicious"; and Burrs, now keeping her, qualified. Out of a squabble with him, the two decide to throw a party. All of their intimates come: Madeline True,

> Her body was marvelous;
> A miracle had fused it.
> The whole world had seen it—
> And a good part had used it:

There are all varieties of unhealthy love-orchids present, who exhibit their natural approaches and bickerings as the group grows drunken. The party "began to reek of sex":

> The bed was a slowly moving tangle
> Of legs and bodies at every angle—

a flirtage paradise. Queenie, indignant with Burrs, succeeds in attracting her chum's admirable escort, Black. She yields to him, the poet preluding this mood with—

> Some love is fire; some love is rust;
> But the fiercest, cleanest love is lust.

Burrs discovers the straying; and the poem ends redly.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, self-described as "the booth where folly holds her fair," is a singing laureate of relaxed monogamy. With high good humor she plays repeatedly this motif:

> And if I loved you Wednesday,
> Well, what is that to you?
> I do not love you Thursday—
> So much is true.

She boasts "But my true love is false!" After drinking "at every vine," she finds no wine as wonderful as thirst. Play with an unloved one is better than hopeless longing for an unattainable beloved:

> I might as well be easing you
> As lie alone in bed.

At times she is gorgeously witty. Because she has been biologically urged, she tells a lover,

> To bear your body's weight upon my breast, . . .
> let me make it plain:
> I find this frenzy insufficient reason
> For conversation when we meet again.

She pictures out of her ladsickness—

> What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
> I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
> Under my head till morning. . . .
> And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
> For unremembered lads that not again
> Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.

Now, she says, summer has ceased to sing within her. A new note comes:

> Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.
> Three women come to wash me clean
> Shall not erase this stain,
> Nor leave me lying purely,
> Awaiting the black lover.
> Death, fumbling to uncover
> My body in his bed,
> Shall know
> There has been one
> Before him.

There is now no need to puzzle over woman's long silence. She is speaking out at last.
The mood in my *The White Peacock* is novel:

> To pleasure me, go out on every road,
> Like a young bud open to every breeze,
> And shower your heaven-lifting charities
> Utterly indiscriminately abroad.
> Belong to all, O lover—for such queenly
> Giving alone has wholly wed you and me.

The picture in the end is summed up:

> And so, in recapitulation,
> To love freely, widely, when the whim awakes.
> Whomever the ruffled desire lights upon,
> For your stirred fancy, not for their starved sakes. . . .
> To love fiercely, absorbingly, your own mate. . . .
> In whose regal general charity you glory,
> Who applauds and eases your own lesser delights,
> Who is one with you in the end, in the high starry
> Joy of violent unvirginal nights
> When the wide ocean lies on the Southern Cross
> In the last unutterable caress.

iii.

Love broadens out first into love of children. Virginia Moore sings that, when she is a woman flowered, she will generate a poem of flesh and blood,

> A live and rounded lyric
> With little riming joints,
> And eyes set, sweet and sudden,
> Like exclamation points.

Eunice Tietjens sings as a bacchante to her child—

> Merrily little roll of fat,
> Made warm to kiss and smooth to pat. . . .
> Look out with those round wondering eyes
> And squirm, and gurgle—and grow wise!

Alice McGuigan, in *Without a Fig Leaf*, sings retrospectively,

> Oh, the little blue shoes, the faded blue shoes,
> The feet that once wore them rest 'neath the night dews;
> The tears of a Mother fall fast as she views
> The little blue shoes, oh, the faded blue shoes.

Samuel Hoffenstein shows the child as highly unpopular with his father; while the mother sings this lullaby to her little "oaf, Mamma's darling sugar-loaf":

> I can stand so much, and then
> Mamma wants maturer men.
> Sleep, my little plague, sleep tight;
> My complexes are bad tonight,
> And papa's friend is waiting now
> To add a horn to papa's brow—
> So sleep, my onus, sleep, my own,
> For if you bawl, you bawl alone.

Love of country was still present; but love of the land's reigning politicians was signally missing. It took Vachel Lindsay to

sear one of the bosses individually, in *To the United States Senate:*

> And must the Senator from Illinois
> Be this squat thing, with blinking, half-closed eyes?
> This brazen gutter idol, reared to power
> Upon a leering pyramid of lies?

Ballots or muskets will end this, says Lindsay: as Giovanitti once sang love or dynamite. One of Lindsay's gods was Bryan:

> Election night at midnight:
> Boy Bryan's defeat.
> Defeat of western silver,
> Defeat of the wheat.
> Victory of letterfiles
> And plutocrats in miles
> With dollar signs upon their coats,
> Diamond watchchains on their vests
> And spats on their feet.

Lindsay sang vehemently of "the old Elijah, Jeremiah, John-the-Baptist soap-box"; Masters echoed the tune. Carl Sandburg uttered colloquially the mood of the city ward-aristocracy:

> Go fifty-fifty.
> If they nail you call in a mouthpiece.
> Fix it, you gazump, you slant-head, fix it.
> Feed 'em.

And then came the war. Reginald Wright Kauffman saw patriotism almost in Bunner's remembered words:

> Hats off to the Flag—for the flag draws near;
> The flag that never has called in vain,
> That has never known the touch of fear
> And never suffered a single stain.

Arthur Guiterman was a popular war singer:

Truce to feud and peace to faction!
Stilled is every party brawl
When the warships clear for action,
When the battle bugles call.

He too rallied men beneath the "stainless and clear" banner, and sang that the marines had kept the flag stainless. Loyal Y. Graham 3rd's song went differently. The first line refers to the National City Bank of New York, the Mussolini of the Antilles:

I've done my bit in Haiti for the dear old N. C. B.,
And also in the Philippines for sugar, hemp, and tea; . . .
In Cuba and Domingo I've had fever in my bones.
When we bumped off lots of Greasers who did not respect our loans. . . .
But I guess when we reach heaven and walk the shining stones,
We'll be doing extra duty to protect somebody's loans!

Herman Hagedorn was one of the war's ebullient lauders:

God, who lovest free men,
Lead on! We come.

Each combatant still awards a general's commission to the deity. But William Rose Benet, in the stark *To the Pack*, spoke differently:

Something you tremolo of, you call *your* country,
Swelling your ego to that eternal brag;
I speak my mind. You shriek at my effront'ry,
And, for a muffler, seize upon the flag. . . .

Give tongue, give tongue unleashed—rave, ruin, shatter,
So long as any free, brave thought endures!
I, too, have loved a land—what does it matter,
It was not yours, it never could be yours!

A real American speaking.
Margaret Widdemer has a woman's word to utter:

Only one thing we women know of war;
We must, when all is said,
Kneel in the land of slave or conqueror
Defeated with our dead.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood saw war as—

A writhing scorpion stinging itself to death. . . .
The Soul biting itself to its own destruction.

John Reed, in the stern *Sangar,* has parricide visited upon the pacifistic father by the patriotic son. Carl Sandburg is always forthright on the theme:

I dreamed a million ghosts of the young workmen rose in their shirts all soaked in crimson . . . and yelled
God damn the grinning kings, God damn the kaiser and the czar.

This was written in 1915. It was not an inept dream. Masters has a returned soldier say:

I killed a Russian soldier
And said: 'You bastard,' as I stuck him through;
You hate yourself, so you just kill to glut
Your hatred of yourself,

which masks itself behind the mask of duty. James Weldon Johnson called war chief of all the scourges of humanity. P. F. McCarthy, in *To a Nine-Inch Gun,* recapitulates the cost of each shot: twenty thousand loaves of bread.

Silence! A million hungry men
Seek bread to fill their mouths again.

Percy Mackaye saw war as serving Krupp instead of Christ.

Armistice, and peace. . . . Samuel Roth surveyed peace prospects:

When the talons of the gray hawk in the north are broken;

When the wild boar of the East is crushed and the bees may
build their honeycombs in his husk;
When the backyard of the continent is cleaned and swept;
And when the hunter puts up his rifle and buries his contempt
There will be peace in Europe,
The profound, undisturbed peace of the dead. . .

Stephen Vincent Benet, in *John Brown's Body*, took a magnificent theme for his survey of his land. But his technique was unequal to the high aspiration. He saw the war's ending as a burial of the bygone South, slavery, the dream of a tropic slave empire, "the last foray of aristocracy." These are not wholly dead yet. We return to John Brown:

Out of his body grows revolving steel,
Out of his body grows the spinning wheel
Made up of wheels, the new, mechanic birth. . . .
Out of John Brown's strong sinews the tall skyscrapers grow.

Of course, John Brown, like a hill-summoning Hebrew prophet, sought to call the Negroes into freedom and leisure; and, out of the harvest of his call, they have arrived at industrial slavery. To that extent Benet's last vision brushes accuracy.

At about the same time, an American woman sat down and surveyed her country. Alice Fay, in *Our America: A Symphony of the New World*, omits little in her clear vision. There is hopefulness here, but it is a hopefulness for the future, not a purr denying present ills.

I tell the glory of America,
Here is a new order!
Here is a new world!
Here is a new day!

The purple robe of old-world oppressions is torn; broken chains are hurled into the void, as the colonists came:

Out of the sea they have raised their towers, their dreams,
Built upon Plymouth Rocks. . . .

This is the Dream that lives in the hearts of men. . . .
This is the Hope that lives in the heart of the world.

It is so that the Old World visions the New, before the firsthand scorching contact occurs. The survey is rooted in the fantastic dreams of the redmen, as when she speaks of Niagara:

Here is a race sunk in darkness, scattered and divided,
Fear bears her monstrous brood:
Giants, cased in stone armor, fall upon the wretched people,
Huge beasts uproot their forests,
Great horned and two-headed serpents rise from Lake Ontario
and coil themselves about the Seneca villages, choking
multitudes with their pestilential breath.

This is a more accurate picture of Indian beliefs than all the white renditions already given us. The poet accepts modern machinery, and is whirled by steel on steel across the continent. The past is surveyed along with the present: the tentative white beginnings, the struggle for freedom from foreign masterdom, the slow westward trek, the hemorrhage of the Civil War, and so under dark skies to the present. The Oregon River sings its long song, of the briefness of man's sway over it. The bougainvillea heaven of the Pacific subtropics, the enstoned forest of Arizona, the desert—

Silence wraps me in a cloak of calm,
Night broods,
Coyote spills his stars across the heavens;

the flowery Eden of the South—

Fields of sugar cane and cotton,
Negroes picking,—picking,—picking,—
Cabins,
In the shadows of the cabins—white colonial mansions,
In the Shadow.

The singing survey of the Civil War is brilliant and accurate. After a survey of the World War, she faces the future:

> Yes, even to the farthermost stars,
> Oh, Eternal Justice!
> For this is the work of your hands,
> And this is your glory;
> You are the God of America,
> You are all the gods of all her fathers.

There is no jingoistic cheapness here; and, while the thoughtful may doubt whether man's experiments can fairly be claimed to be starred so highly, the saying of this is the poet's uttering of her wish. She dreams America as a child of Eternal Justice. Such a constructive love of country, widely eddying, will share in shaping tomorrow.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood identified himself with various aspects of Nature, in Whitmanic mood. Miss Millay, in *Renascence*, did the same: she is the man starving in Capri, the victims of a sea-wreck:

> A thousand screams the heavens smote,
> And every scream tore through my throat.
> No hurt I did not feel, no death
> That was not mine.

In *God's World* this became a passionate love of the world:

> "World, world, I cannot get thee close enough!"

Robert Frost sensed the tie uniting all men:

> "Men work together," I told him from the heart,
> "Whether they work together or apart."

Nature itself wears down the things that separate man from man, as *Mending Wall* indicated:

Something there is that doesn't like a wall.

Vachel Lindsay thundered *Sew the Flags Together:*

> Make blood-brothers of us all. . . .
> Highly establish,
> In the name of God,
> The United States of Europe, Asia, and the World.

Witter Bynner, in *To Anyone,* sang that enemies must come together in the end:

> No matter how the die is cast
> Nor who may seem to win,
> You know that you must love at last—
> Why not begin?

Robinson, in *Captain Craig,* reminded us that always:

> Whatever be the altitude you reach,
> You do not rise alone; nor do you fall
> But you drag others down. . . . What you take
> To be the cursedest mean thing that crawls
> On earth is nearer to you than you know:
> You may not ever crush him but you lose,
> You may not ever shield him but you gain.

Here we have a full-throated utterance of this thesis. Man commits suicide when he kills man in battle, or otherwise; he mutilates himself when he injures a field-mouse; he harms himself when he crushes the mountain-daisy. His major enemies are the environment: storm, flood, volcano, cold, heat, the ocean, scarcity of food, the inertia of matter. He may need to hold in check uncultured germs and undiplomaed mosquito, and such small deer; but these can be overcome without tanks and machine-guns. There is small loss in attempting to treat a waterspout or a wandering comet politely, at least until the intruder prove itself flint to courtesy.

In *The Blue-Flag in the Bog*, even heaven does not satisfy Miss Millay with earth left behind. Vachel Lindsay and Lew Sarett especially sang love of animals, as symbols of human revolt. And Olive Tilford Dargan spoke the widest form of the mood in:

> And this, my Earth, I know;
> Though for my hand
> Space hold our spheres like roses, and
> Like country lanes their orbits blow,
> If thou be green, and blossom still,
> Then I must downward go;
> Leave stars to keep
> House as they will;
> The winds to walk, or turn and sleep;
> Seas to spare or kill.
> Behind my back shall sunsets burn
> Bereft of my concern;
> Each wonder passed
> Shall speed my haste,
> Till I have paused as now
> Beneath a bending apple bough,
> An April apple bough,
> Where Southern waters creep.

iv.

Beauty fared better, in an age largely tailormade. Hilda Doolittle, an expatriate in England, sang anemically of it:

> O rough-hewn
> god of the orchard, . . .
> spare us from loveliness.

With firmer music John Hall Wheelock traced beauty to its mother:

> Deftly does the dust express
> In mind her hidden loveliness,

And from her cool silence stream
The cricket's cry and Dante's dream
For the earth that breeds the trees
Breeds cities, too, and symphonies. . . .
Through Leonardo's hand she seeks
Herself, and through Beethoven speaks
In holy thunderings around
The awful message of the ground.

Vachel Lindsay speaks of "Art's deliberate freedom": a diet for thought. Miss Millay is waylaid by beauty, sensed by her even in the marsh songs of the frogs. In a tremendous conceit, she says:

Euclid alone has looked on beauty bare. . . .
Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

Elinor Wylie was astringent in her worship of beauty:

Oh, she is neither good nor bad,
But innocent and wild!
Enshrine her and she dies, who had
The hard heart of a child.

She specifies "These to me are beautiful people," continuing with a brilliant self-description:

The eyes large and wide apart.
They carry a dagger in the heart
So keen and clean it never rankles.
They wear small bones in wrists and ankles.

Plotkin, speaking for the ordinary man, orders:

Waiter, waiter, give me beauty—
"All we have is noodle soup."

Not pretty, but we do not always make truth lovely among men. Robinson Jeffers insists that beauty is found in a line of fishing-boats in a fog, as much as in a flight of pelicans, or a flight of planets. In one of his greatest sonnets, Arthur Davison Ficke sees cleanly why beauty buds so slowly among us. He has learned what the ancient singer knew, that thinking can not alter his limited body:

> And with reproach no longer rack a skull
> Whose rigid plan, conditioned long ago,
> Left such low arches for the beautiful
> To pour its summer light through.

He accepts the dusk that haunts his breast. It is this dusk which dulls us to beauty.

Song is extolled. James Weldon Johnson, in *O Black and Unknown Bards*, laurelled the unnamed authors of the Negro spirituals:

> Not that great German master in his dream
> Of harmonies that thundered amongst the stars
> At the creation, ever heard a theme
> Nobler than "Go down, Moses." Mark its bars,
> How like a mighty trumpet-call they stir
> The blood. Such are the notes that men have sung
> Going to valorous deeds.

With Langston Hughes, the tempo quickens:

> Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
> Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
> I heard a Negro play.
> Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
> By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
> He did a lazy sway
> To the tune o' those Weary Blues. . . .
> "I got the Weary Blues
> And I can't be satisfied. . . .

I ain't happy no mo'
And I wish that I had died."

The tune grows swifter, as he reaches *Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret:*

Play that thing,
Jazz band! . . .
You know that tune
That laughs and cries at the same time.
Can I go home wid yuh, sweetie?
Sure.

Gwendolyn Bennett sings the same theme well; but Hughes has caught it most of all. Here is *Harlem Night Club:*

Sleek black boys in a cabaret.
Jazz-band, jazz-band, play, PLAY, PLAY! . . .
White girls' eyes
Call gay black boys,
Black boys' lips
Grin jungle joys.

The actual reality of this race's mad serfdom to syncopated music can never be phrased in words. It is more magnificent than the wildest song.

My *Greenwich Village Blues* sees Tomorrow as a jazz Utopia:

Then let the dance forever reign
With joy and laughter in its train!
If any man vents cynic breath,
We'll make him laugh his grouch to death! . . .
In fact, the Future is listed as
The Era of Universal Jazz!

Stephen Vincent Benet, in *The Mountain Whippoorwill,* catches Georgia fiddling amazingly. He is as vigorous in the staider *Unfamiliar Quartet:*

The violin wept its sugar, the saxophone
Howled like a mandrake raped by a lightning-stroke,
The cello gave a blond and stomachy groan,
And then the hard bugle spoke. . . .
Sewing a wound together with brazen stitches,
Stitching a bronze device on the rotten skin,
And calling the elegant audience sons of bitches.
It ceased, and the sons of bitches
Applauded the violin.

Beauty was increasingly implicit in the whole range of the poetry. Witter Bynner sang *A Thrush in the Moonlight* overpoweringly:

In came the moon and covered me with wonder,
Touched me and was near me and made me very still.
In came a rush of song, like rain after thunder,
Pouring importunate on my window-sill.

I lowered my head, I hid it, I would not see nor hear,
The bird-song had stricken me, had brought the moon too near.
But when I dared to lift my head, night began to fill
With singing in the darkness. And then the thrush grew still.

And the moon came in, and silence, on my window-sill.

Robert Frost saw it in a meadow of *Rose Pogonias*. He prayed that the place might be forgot in the general mowing; or at least—

That none should mow the grass there
While so confused with flowers.

George Sterling could lift himself above his embogment in echoes to sing, in *The Glass of Time:*

A solitary kildee, running fleet,
(The one unquiet thing that meets the sight)
Slips like a bead along the thread of light
Where land and water meet,

and the even more tumultuously lovely ending of *The Black Vulture:*

> And least of all he holds the human swarm,
> Unwitting now that envious men prepare
> To make their dream and its fulfilment one,
> When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
> Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
> His roads between the thunder and the sun.

Even as we write this, men over the world are preparing to make the latest dreams caught here fulfilments. As you read this, even later dreams are being wrought into fact: and still later ones are beginning to bud merely as dreams. Armed with this mood of interpretation, you need never cease reading the slowly opening tomorrows. . . .

Lew Sarett's *Whistling Wings* shake with beauty:

> Beyond the peaks
> That tusked the sky like fangs of a coyote snarling,
> The full-blown mellow moon that floated up
> Like a liquid-silver bubble from the waters
> Serenely, till she pricked her delicate film
> On the slender splinter of a cloud, melted,
> And trickled from the silver-dripping edges.

Muna Lee, in *San Cristobal,* catches the drowsy beauty of the tropics:

> Incredibly blue is the sea,
> Incredibly blue is the sky;
> And above a wall four centuries old
> Drifts a yellow butterfly.

Even E. E. Cummings has rare spots of beauty; and Edwin Curran is surcharged with it:

> When spring comes laughing on the world again,
> Her hands thrust upward to the burning sun.

Of a *Winter Night:*

> The stars like bells flash down the silver sky.

His most magnificent passage opens magnificently:

> Sentinel, break the night with a golden spear.

Several of my *Eagle Sonnets* pay tribute to this sensed harmony of things:

> Beauty is one and all things, at all hours. . . .
> The throb and surge
> When the dark sea leaps to unfold a star:
> Beauty is all we know and all we are.

Men and women are "her shadow on the earth,"—"the singing shadows beauty casts." Gloria Goddard, in *Day's End,* sings this magic:

> The drowsy hills stretch themselves,
> And rise out of the sea,
> Where they have lain thru the long hot day.
> They push back the tangled surf
> Clinging to their sand-stiff skirts.
>
> The freshening wind runs tender fingers
> Thru the matted trees,
> And makes their leaves blow and wave and cling
> Like a young girl's uncaught hair.
> The languid hills awake refreshed,
> And kiss the sky's cool brow.
> Cloud mountains fling back
> Rose echoes of the sun.
>
> A young moon deserts the cloudy chase,
> And dreams in a garden of stars.

It is so that beauty speaks.

v.

The gods, throughout the period, sagged from some of their old popularity. There is subtle satire in Viereck's picture of John Pierpont Morgan's entrance into heaven:

> With no uncertainty of fate
> He brushed aside the angel throng
> And strode through the emblazoned great
> Into the Heaven of the strong.

Robinson was a critical believer:

> And if God be God, He is Love;
> And though the Dawn be still so dim,
> It shows us we have played enough
> With creeds that make a fiend of him.

In *Captain Craig* he stated that man would build one pyramid out of the embers of all shrines: a unanimity of religion, out of the darkening ashes of all faiths. His *Then Man Against the Sky* was an impassioned plea for personal immortality; otherwise, he asked, why not commit suicide?

Joyce Kilmer, a Catholic convert, was devout:

> Poems are made by fools like me,
> But only God can make a tree.

Charles Erskine Scott Wood was a rationalist:

Man makes his god and thinks his god makes him.
There is no god but nature, no hell but of man's making. . . .
Each sees his narrow shadow, and thinks it is god. . . .
I, myself, am god and a maker of gods.
Godhood is to exist.

This liberal definition deifies even a discarded chewing-gum wrapper. Its inclusiveness is suicidal to definiteness of thought.

Vachel Lindsay is a believer. His General William Booth strode into heaven; his following of drabs, vixens, weasel-heads and the like were miraculously altered, by the approach there of Jesus, into—

> Sages and sibyls now, and athletes clean,
> Rulers of empire, and of forests green!

He even chants *Foreign Missions in Battle Array*. Yet he is as much at home in chanting Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo, and other voodoo deities. He begs, "Who can surrender to Christ?"; and at the same time paints the hell to which Simon Legree arrives in the most attractive colors. Christianity is syncopated, in *The Daniel Jazz:*

> He whitewashed the cellar. He shovelled in the coal.
> And Daniel kept a-saying:—"Lord save my soul." . . .

Darius is not pleased with his adjutant:

> He said:—"Your Daniel is a dead little pigeon.
> He's a good hard worker, but he talks religion."

A believer, in all probability. . . . But he takes his faith lightly.

Miss Millay's first noted poem, *Renascence*, throbbed with faith:

> God, I can push the grass apart
> And lay my finger on Thy heart!

While she identifies deity with nature, she is religious in essence:

> Not Truth, but Faith, it is
> That keeps the world alive. If all at once
> Faith were to slacken,— . . . birds now flying fearless
> Across would drop in terror to the earth;
> Fishes would drown; and the all-governing reins

Would tangle in the frantic hands of God
And the worlds gallop headlong to destruction!

James Oppenheim, quite as religious, placed god elsewhere:

There is only one Divinity: Yourself.
Only one God: You.

Masters, in *Domesday Book* especially, takes the deity to task for earthquakes, storms, shipwrecks, cancers. Giovanitti, speaking for labor, rejects religion:

I want no Jesus Christ to think
That he could ever die for me.

Gelett Burgess, in *Darkness Before Dawn*, sternly orders:

Make Thy load too burdensome for human kind to bear!

so that man, "divinely glorified," "shall alone achieve the Brotherhood of Man." Samuel A. DeWitt, again speaking for labor, grew sentimentally pantheistic:

There are only three Messiahs;
They do not preach;
They cannot lie;
They change everything:
The sun, the water and the wind.

William Rose Benet, in *The Falconer of God*, sent his soul flying after divinity. In the end, he is still searching. Labor, when not rejecting religion as a whole, sought to annex the originator of Christianity, as in Sarah Cleghorn's *Comrade Jesus*, and its kindred. Sandburg rebuked exploiting evangelists, as in *To a Contemporary Bunkshooter:*

You come along . . . tearing your shirt . . . yelling about Jesus.

Where do you get that stuff?
What do you know about Jesus? . . .
I say the same bunch backing you nailed the nails into the hands of this Jesus of Nazareth. He had lined up against him the same crooks and strong-arm men now lined up with you paying your way.

In wartime, he pictures the seven nations listening to "I am the way and the light," and the rest of it, and answering, "O Hell!" Later other nations entered into the martial chorus.

In *The Great Carousal*, Louis Untermeyer pictures that scattering non-survival of the individual soul termed vegetable immortality:

And every butterfly or bee
That tastes the flower shall drink of me.

Witter Bynner was in the self-identifying mood:

I wait no more. . . . The way is rough,
But the god who climbs is I!

Laughter, he says, will end all the gods. In *The New World*, he insists, "Everyone must be God." Ridgeley Torrence, in the singing *Eye-Witness*, phrased a roving tramp's vision more simply:

My heart went open like an apple sliced:
I saw my Savior and I saw my Christ. . . .

I looked into his eyes and I read the news;
His heart was having the railroad blues.

When the tramp asks Jesus to room within the tramp's heart,

He looked and he said: "Oh, we still must roam,
But if you'll keep it open, well, I'll call it 'home.' "

Adolph Wolff, a periodic anarchist who veered in and out of conservatism, was once jailed for this utterance:

On to the house of God, ye men. . . . If he refuse to succor us. . . .
Then let us blow his house to hell! . . .
Damned be the God who will refuse his house unto his children.

Simon N. Patten, in *Advent Songs*, sought to rewrite the old hymns with new social vision. One proceeds,

When all the nations seek to bluff,
When battling foes their cultures slough,
When neutral folks their pockets stuff,
Then, then, O God, we cry enough.

Stand Up for Jesus reappears as:

Stand up for God and nation,
In Heaven put your trust,
Without the smoke of battle
Disputed claims adjust. . . .

Stand up for God and nation,
To women give the vote,
For righteousness they battle,
The public good promote.

God is to be crowned with "vironal weal," which seems to have something to do with a bettered environment. Tailing the hymns come such songs as *Dixie*, redone as a woman's rights anthem; and *Old Black Joe*, with a new refrain, the "blight of rum." Even its earnestness could not save this.

The Negro poets still at times sang Jesus simply. James Weldon Johnson, in *God's Trombones*, threw himself splendidly back into this mood, as in this opening of the sermon *The Creation:*

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

There is the equally stately music of *Go Down, Death,* and many more. Waverly Turner Carmichael, Langston Hughes, and others, are as singingly homesick for the oldtime religion.

Scudder Middleton has his warning to the inhabitants of Paradise:

> Oh, guard the gates that shut you in!
> Make sure the world behind your eyes!
> My world of men and lust and wheels
> Begins to march on Paradise.

Strangely accurate. Even Nathalia Crane, that odd alloy, calls the madonna "Slipheel who fell the stair," and speaks of God's popcorn sceptre and his dotard stage. Lee Wilson Dodd rebukes all of the brethren of the cloth, saying that the Fundamentalist strives—

> To banish Freedom and make love a whore,

while he and the Modernist both are—

> Intemperate zealots for Publicity.

Robinson Jeffers says flatly,

> Christianity is false. . . .
> God is in every creature.

My *De Glory Road* pictures a rollicking Negro elysium; *Exit Salvatore,* in the same volume, swings to the opposite extreme. *Jehovah* traces the growth of the twice adopted Christian Allfather from his Kenite manhood to the ultimate prophetic deification as god of love, joy, and beauty. *Modern Evangelism,* based on a Presbyterian boast that missionaries of exceptional physical strength were being sent out to meet "the modern wall of scorn and blasphemy from radicals," proceeds:

> "Fellers," his pugilistic mug
> Curved odorously sneery,

"A Bolshevist, he is gone bug—
Them Socialists make me weary—
Dearie!
I'd drive the whole damned flock off
To Russia—ship 'em iced!
I'll knock their blooming block off
In the name of Jesus Christ!"

Morality, an aspect of the emotional desires that give birth to religion, fared variously during the period. Robinson says of *New England:*

Passion here is a soilure of the wits,
We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;
Joy shivers in the corner where she knits,
And Conscience always has the rocking-chair.

His title might be expanded. Masters indicts the tyranny of superstitions, customs, laws, rules: of the church, of beliefs of right and wrong,—ghosts of dead faiths and creeds:

The tyranny, in short, that starves and chains,
Imprisons, scourges, crucifies the soul,
Which only asks the chance to live and love
Freely as it wishes.

Oppenheim is in tune with the latest psychology:

The real sin is in being divided against yourself:
In wanting one thing and doing another.

The integration of the individual—becoming a unit against and with the world—is the wise soul's aim.

Robinson Jeffers topples over the pyramids, when he has the evangelist in *The Women at Point Sur* say that the law is what the heart, or any part of the body, desires. There is no wickedness, no sin in the world, he continues. Lee Wilson Dodd is

the counter-chorus, resenting the idea that goodness is inhibited desire, and that man is a mechanistic product of nature:

> Thus is the Mind by its own maggots soiled,
> Whose only virtue now's to be "hard-boiled,"
> Tough-fibred, fatuous, cynically pert,
> Unwarm'd by sunshine, undismay'd by dirt.

And, at the end, the quiet voice of Gloria Goddard:

> Oaks still whisper wisely to the wind,
> Though incredulity has laid the oracles
> Men thought they sheltered;
> Brooks still chatter to the placid stones,
> Though the naids are disproved. . . .
> When will man's wisdom teach
> That the temple is brightened when unclouded
> By the dusty images of gods?

Otis Peabody Swift, in his astonishing *Symposium,* sings of the present surviving gods, such as the street evangelists:

> Hoop-la God, he's right here on the platform, boys!
> Sock 'em with the calliope, shake the tambourine.
> Busted flat in Davenport, five years back on Christmas Eve
> I came clean with God, boys, and God came clean.

Here is the Episcopalian deity:

> Ours is a righteous god, gold blazoned banners,
> God's peeping through the reredos, counting up the gate.
> Pull out the organ stops, here come the vestrymen,
> Bankers stepping softly as they pass the silver plate. . . .
>
> Swing the skirt of scarlet robes, pour the sherry carefully,
> God knows what God thinks, on his golden throne,
> Getting it by radio every Sunday morning.
> But we know our proper God is God of Gods alone!

Up in an attic in Washington Square, God is dissected, sin analyzed:

Squeeze the oranges, pass the gin!
God is a cretin's nightmare dream.
Ours nude reality, intellectuality,
Ours is a world where things are what they seem!

Sixteen moderns on a dead god's chest.
Whoops, that girl just said "God Damn!"
Stick him on the microscope, try him with the stethoscope,
God's as dead as a parboiled ham!

Gods of our yesterdays—ashes of a cigarette!
We read all the books. They do not lie.
Dead the awful vengeance gods, dead the smug and lawful gods.
By the new psychology I prove that God is I!

This is as critically destructive as Lee Wilson Dodd. The evangelist's god inspires no reverence, as this poet pictures him; nor the Episcopalian; and least of all the intellectual's god, so pictured. The age is fumbling: the Rock of Ages has turned out, to many, to be a mirage, and the next step is foggy.

vi.

Objectively, this is the age of machinery; subjectively, the age of science, of achieving intelligence,—the first of such ages. Man's intellectual hunger has functioned more swiftly than ever before.

Viereck's *Slaves* is shrewd observation:

No puppet master pulls the strings on high,
 Portioning our parts, the tinsel and the paint;
A twisted nerve, a ganglion gone awry,
 Predestinates the sinner and the saint.

Each, held more firmly than by hempen band,
Slave of his entrails, struts across the scene:
The malnutrition of some obscure gland
Makes him a Ripper or the Nazarene.

Frost, in an enduring polished line, wrote:

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.

Percy Mackaye was not too forward-looking in *School*, where old Hezekiah's son Eben breaks his hoe in exasperation, and deserts the farm to attend the Academy, and learn the humanities and the sciences. The boy graduates, and returns:

Henceforth he hoed the dream in with the dung. . . .

At last old Hezekiah loosed his tongue:

"Well, boy, this school—what has it learned ye to know?"
He said: "To hoe."

Vachel Lindsay sees the new learning as "Forerunner of a higher mystic day." But he is really anti-intellect; for, in *Another Word on the Scientific Inspiration*, he rebukes the man who can see "hydraulics to a daisy, and contraptions to a tree"—

And I hope all men
Who think like this
Will soon lie
Underground.

Witter Bynner sees intelligence overcoming war in the end:

In fields where hate has hurled
Its force, where folly rots,
Wisdom shall be uncurled
Small as forget-me-nots.

Elinor Wylie, obviously cerebral, sang of her intelligence:

> This cool and laughing mind, renewed
> From covert sources like a spring's,
> Is potent to translate the mood
> Of all distraught and twisted things.

Jean Starr Untermeyer shrewdly says, "Knowledge can never be an end designed, but lies in searching."

Meanwhile, the wits had their flings at formal education. F. P. A. paints the student who sees football as a college's one major course. Arthur Guiterman is astringently lyrical on *A Pure Mathematician:*

> Sublime he sits, no Worldly Strife
> His Bosom vexes,
> Reducing all the Doubts of Life
> To y's and x's.

In *Education,* Seymour Barnard slugs the colleges who lop off professors for tactless truth-telling, having the trustees sing—

> Should he wish to teach what *he* thinks,
> Then he ought to pay himself!

Jacques LeClerq, in *A Sorbonne of the Hinterland,* covers the whole field. After bringing on the feeble-minded gridiron material; the girls, ranging from the prudes to "girls that go the limit"; the students, "Christers," and rounders; and the gallimaufry of assorted professors, including experts in Motion Picture Writing, Swine Husbandry, and Old Tyrolese:

> Bring on the swag, lads; commissions, diplomas,
> Appointments, fellowships, deliver them in trucks,
> Life's brightest years, says the Baccalaureate Orator,
> Kiss me on the lips, says the Sheik in his Tux.
> Rah! Rah! Rah! Three thousand college graduates,
> Sing a song of learning now: Fiat Lux!

The last two words once meant "Let there be Light." The first has been taken as the name of a smart foreign car; the second, as the name of a flaked soap. The original meaning is known only to the *Pedant*—of whom LeClercq sings on:

> So whilst through lexicons his fingers roam
> In philologic hunt, he has forgot
> How crimson roses flamed through ancient Rome
> And slender lilies shone in Camelot!

Lee Wilson Dodd goes slam-bang at the accepted field of scholarship and science—and he hardly overstates the case. Today—

> But profits lurk
> Rather in self-laudation than good work.
> The Scholar, now, and Scientist, both vie
> With Sheiks and Vampires for the public eye,

and both burst into print with—

> Proves Ectoplasm an Etheric Wave!
> Finds a live Pterodactyl in a Cave!
> Communicates with Saturn! Changes Rat
> From Male to Female! Educates a Cat! . . .
> Or, in another vein: Psychologist
> Says Paranoiacs never have been kiss'd!
> Or, W——n demonstrates that human thought is
> But a contraction of the Epiglottis
> Or, Herr Director Lästigkeit is sure
> Sex-perverts only write good literature!
> Such are the grave pronouncements of our Wise,
> And in such verbiage all their honor—*lies*.

My *A Star Comes Singing* visions some of the limitations of the intellect:

> He dares to pilfer pitiful fragments of the reason of things,
> This tiny piece claiming to understand
> The limitless machine of which it is a part.

The Eagle Sonnets survey the intellect's limitations clearly; and evaluate the conflict between the vast mindless emotions and their young serf, the mind:

> We cling to life, because we are a veil
> Of thought, over a vast unthinkingness.
> For its few seconds, thinking lifts its frail
> And timid form—and then the bottomless
> Urges of being, blinder than the mole,
> Blind as the battered rock that sleeps forever,
> Speak the authentic mandate of the soul—
> Ruling the brain, so impotently clever.
> If the bedevilled brain, driven and breaking,
> Ask of the self: should I not rather die,
> Than stretch forever on a rack of aching?
> Gloating stupidly, whip lifted on high,
> The will beneath, as rank as swampland fennel,
> Lashes dog reason back into his kennel.

Yet there is wisdom in the final conclusion:

> Though reason let our craft drift out to sea,
> Yet we shall find no truer guide than he.

vii.

And the last desire of all . . . to return, to retrace the barred deep-rutted path that leads back through youth to the lifelessness before it . . . to death. . . .

It may surprise us to find out that certain favorite poets have this theme as their dominant word; and that this is why they became, and remain, favorites. They stem out of *Home Sweet Home;* or *Rock Me to Sleep, Mother;* or back to "O that this too too solid flesh would melt."

Take Robert Frost. His first volume looked backward. Its first poem phrased a desire to lose himself within a fantasied forest stretching away to the edge of doom. He sees no reason ever to return to civilization. Again, the poet says:

I dwell in a lonely house I know
That vanished many a summer ago.

The corpses buried out under the trees are, to him, "As sweet companions as might be had." The poet begs the thawing wind to melt his window, and "Turn the poet out of door." Back to the wilds . . . the return to uncitified youth. . . .

Later volumes add to the theme. *The Death of the Hired Man* tells of the farm laborer who returned to the farm to die. The lovely *Birches* includes—

So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.

The Sound of the Trees will, in the end, make him leave civilization to return to them. The city hardly enters his poetry: but he senses the brook buried years before beneath the city, whose dreadful prisoned course still troubles the city's dreaming.

David Morton's gentle sonnets are all in the same mood. His *Wooden Ships* "are remembering forests where they grew." When he joins in a chorus, he is aware of returning presences, "Pleased that we sing old songs they still may know." Even the schoolboy reading his Iliad "dreams of marbles and of tops, and nods."

Vachel Lindsay, in *The Santa Fe Trail,* turns his back on today, as represented by the westward army of automobiles, to "talk with the leaves of the mulberry tree," and even with the souls of the grass in the ground. *The Chinese Nightingale* is themed on memories of the past; *The Ghosts of the Buffaloes* is a dreaming for things gone. Man has no other way to revive these: and the dream of yesterday is persistently sweet.

Carl Sandburg can turn back from a troubling today to sing of *River Roads.* Conrad Aiken at times moves in the spell of yesterday utterly. Elinor Wylie, who always words a general wish uniquely, desires in *Nebuchadnezzar* to return to an old diet of grass and dandelions and—

The clover is honey and sun and the smell of sleep.

William Rose Benet travels backward down the paged lanes of history, to revisit *Merchants from Cathay* or Timurlane's hour. Orrick Johns desires the return:

> Oh better let the little things I loved when little
> Return when the heart finds the great things brittle.

Rose O'Neill sighs for the days "When I was young and dear." Arthur Guiterman sings *The Home Wind,* whose "voice is sweet in the city street." He pleads,

> God, give me hills to climb,
> And strength for climbing!

Samuel Roth, in one of his amplest poems, lauds *Nustscha,* the village of his birth. Mark Van Doren, like a lesser Frost, sings costively of the countryside. A bright singing of the same mood appears in Genevieve Taggard's *Forever Lost,* seeing herself "like birds forever flying"—

> Arrowed I fly, and like them lost forever,
> Having once seen
> Scarlet in a jungle, by a deep river—
> Scarlet and green.

My *Apocalypse* vehemently indicts men:

> Who have poured a poison over the space
> Of office building and dwelling place,
> That no nostalgic glimpse may see
> Their mother and youth in greenery. . . .
> That the sun may be but a light to their chores,
> Reined and chained forever indoors,—

that all the things of nature "be nothing before man's face." The appeal is for man to return to the green world, which was his youth, and which will be his leafing mausoleum. This poet is hillborn; and, at the end,

O hills, my hills, it is you will shield me,
And quietly fold me again to your breast,
When my heart is done at last with the valley,
And I look to the hilly heights for rest.
Bright at the end of a long tired groping
The hour for sleeping, and you the bed,
With the sun-wide green of the trees to cover
Over and over the quiet head.

Man looks beyond youth to the first non-beingness called death. John Hall Wheelock, in *Night Has Its Fear*, sings of the human spirit:

Her being is
Throned on so frail a pulse; such fleeting breath
Bears up her dream across the gulf of death
And the obscure abyss.

Always she hears
The hurtling chariots of the hurrying blood,
Her shuttling breath that in the solitude
Weaves the one self she wears.

Robinson is never more magical than in *The Mill.* The miller's wife finds her husband's body hanging from a beam, and reasons that one way of the few open to her would hide her, and would leave no mark:

Black water, smooth above the weir
Like starry velvet in the night,
Though ruffled once, would soon appear
The same as ever to the sight.

In his best song, Harold Vinal sings *Doomsday:*

Silas, put your hoe away,
Let the full bins rot alone,
Leave the bridles and the hay,

Hitch the two mares to a stone;
You have rounded out your day;
Death is hungry for his bone.

Home Burial is one of Frost's strongest poems. *"Out, Out—"* is as well wrought, on the same theme, death.

Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* deals largely with the matter:

All, all are sleeping on the hill.

The book stated two of life's major desires: death, accompanied by an overtone of sex talk largely uncensored. The *New Spoon River* mildened the second note, and abstractified the whole. It did not thrill so much. In one of his most singing lyrics, the poet says:

When the sea has devoured the ships, . . .
And all the cities
Are one with the plains again,
And the beauty of bronze,
And the strength of steel,
Are blown over silent continents,
As the desert sand is blown,
My dust with yours forever.

His wish here is for a wholesale annihilation of life. In his *Hymn to the Dead,* he calls the realm of the dead the Supreme Reality. *Domesday Book* is themed upon one individual death, and its eddying influences. The theme is no stranger to any of Masters' writings.

To Sandburg, death is the *Junk Man;* and those he takes with him are glad to go. Again:

Death is stronger than all proud men and so death snips proud men on the nose, throws a pair of dice and says: Read 'em and weep. . . .

Death is a nurse mother with big arms: "Twon't hurt you at all; it's your time now; you just need a long sleep, child; what have you had anyhow better than sleep?"

The living belong to the dead, he says, and move under their abiding shadow. Death is no respecter of bank accounts: Huntingdon the railroad builder and Blithery the section hand each "sleep in houses six feet long." He is melodious about it:

> Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.

In *Golden Death,* Oppenheim arrives at:

> Having lived greatly, (let us)
> Go laughing to death.

In *Hymn to Death,* he hails it as his secret bride. Margaret Widdemer lets death speak to her:

> I am the Dark Cavalier; I am the Last Lover;
> I promise faithfulness no other lips may keep;
> Safe in my bridal place, comforted by darkness,
> You shall lie happily, smiling in your sleep.

Amy Lowell, in *The Last Quarter of the Moon,* wishes to be "pushed into nothingness by a breath" and to find "engulfing death." In *Dreams in War Times,* as she digs a grave, her own face lies like a white pebble on the dried leaves behind her, waiting. Constantly in her verses she phrased her welcome to this last lover.

Miss Millay's *Renascence* includes a death motif. She sings of suicide, with no punishment in heaven except that the spirit, having laid by one task, must be taskless thereafter. In *The Shroud* she welcomes death, seeking a symbolic red gown for her final scattering. Many of her sonnets deal with the death of her beloved for the time being. In her exquisite *The Poet and His Book,* she fought against annihilation for herself after death, by pleading for memory of her song:

> When these veins are weeds,
> When these hollowed sockets

Watch the rooty seeds
 Bursting down like rockets,
And surmise the spring again,
 Or, remote in that black cupboard,
 Watch the pink worms writhing upward
At the smell of rain,

she begs lovers, farmers, shepherds, all men, all women, boys and girls, to keep her song alive in their hearts:

Sexton, ply your trade!
 In a shower of gravel
Stamp upon your spade!
 Many a rose shall ravel,
Many a metal wreath shall rust
 In the rain, and I go singing
 Through the lots where you are flinging
Yellow clay on dust!

Her epitaphs for D. C. are exquisite. Tired with the monotony of the similar years, she says—

I would at times the funeral were done
And I abandoned on the ultimate hill.

Elinor Wylie longed for death from the first. *Sanctuary* uttered this desire:

How can I breathe? *You can't, you fool!*

Escape has the same idea; *Fire and Sleep and Candlelight* contains, "Whatever is broken The earth may hide," with personal implications. In *Three Wishes* she seeks to "sink out of being"; *Prophecy* said the same thing, more softly; *Epitaph* was prophetic; *Gauntlet* pictured herself, "The noose draws tighter; This is the end." *Beaver Up* pictured two of her lovers finding her skeleton, with differing emotions. She is ready for the summons:

I shall bend down my bosom to the snake,
As to an infant for its father's sake—

herself the father of her own death. This becomes increasingly the burden of her song: "I dream no ill of Death." In *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, which appeared posthumously, she wrote,

My flesh was but a fresh-embroidered shroud.

Upon her lover's heart she begged,

Give me the dearest privilege to die;
Your pity for the velvet of my pall;
Your patience for my grave's inviolate wall.

Gloria Goddard wrote *Early Autumn*, upon the occasion of Mrs. Wylie's death:

Yours was that rich fulfilment,
And like a queen,
Weary of too long audience with dull-witted ones,
Quietly, with a flaming smile,
That knew the choice,
You bowed graciously,
And, opening wide that door,
Dismissed the world.

One of the most popular poems evoked by the war was Alan Seeger's—

I have a rendezvous with Death. . . .
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

Nor did he. Untermeyer sees death as a "long and vivid holiday." When he was a live man, he sings,

I got no attention;
My life was so small
The world didn't know
I was living at all;

and with direct speech he says that his mission to feed some tree's roots is his most effective achievement. Jean Starr Untermeyer begs, "Take me under thy wing, O Death!" Witter Bynner sees life and death as identical. Ficke praises death, because it brings sleep. Adelaide Crapsey's song was largely of death. She dirges exquisitely,

Never the nightingale,
Oh, my dear,
Never again the lark
Thou wilt hear;
Though dusk and the morning still
Tap at thy window-sill,
Though ever love call and call
Thou wilt not hear at all,
My dear, my dear.

James Weldon Johnson, in *The Suicide*, advocates self-destruction, as Dunbar had before him. Countee Cullen has the same note; so has Langston Hughes, in *Suicide Note:*

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.

It is a commentary on our civilization that this note is wrung out of this four.

John Richard Moreland is lyrical on death:

A grave seems only six feet deep
And three feet wide,
Viewed with the calculating eye
Of one outside.

But when fast bound in the chill loam
For that strange sleep,
Who knows how wide its realm may be?
Its depth, how deep?

W. W. Christman, a close poet of nature, sang, *In a Neglected Graveyard,* his desire that the dead move over an inch or two, to give him room to join them. Kathryn White Ryan brilliantly tells the earth, "I'll be one of your loves, I'll be won, after all." Joseph Auslander echoes the chorus:

> I only want this body to be still;
> I only want these throbbing valves to crack.

Virginia Moore, affected by the sight of a dragon-fly's coat, says "I will slit my throat Quick as an eye." Rose O'Neill urges men to "Follow, follow, follow, Follow the flying dead." Lew Sarett prays, "Let me go down to dust." Man's last friend, says J. U. Nicolson, is a pickax and spade. Donald Evans said, "Finally, life was kind. It let him die." Bodenheim limns exquisitely, "Death is a black slave with little silver birds." Even Robert W. Service hails death, in *The Shooting of Dan Magrew.* Ralph Cheyney's *A Lover for Death* is lovely:

> Oh, who will find a lover for Death and for her only?
> Though all men kiss her lips, they kiss against their will.
> Oh, pity Death! Wistful she is, and exquisite and lonely,
> And all who sleep with her lie curiously still.

There are more lovers for death than this poet dreams of. They are limited in number only by the number of the human race.

The immediate yesterday . . . today. . . .

Food, as a rule, enough to make singing for it unneeded. . . . Railings against the drunkard and the saloon. . . . The Panama Canal welcomed. . . . Labor vehemently demanding an end to capitalistic oppression; the Negro demanding an end to inequality based on race; America mired in dollar-worship; decay of the mass; the machine age reviled and welcomed; halitosis as the reward of five out of four of us; progress largely mythical, with lynching real. . . .

Madmen and madwomen shout aloud their entangled orts of

thought; flight from today advocated; and then the awakening of labor's revolt; a clearing vision of an unfettered tomorrow. There is no voice raised for the fetters; though they persist.

Love desire started with soft romantic flutings, and woke to harsh realism concerning the dryrot of ordinary marriage, a laudation of bastards and birth control, a wide song against prostitution, a growing word for miscegenation, a general jazzing up of love: "Let's do it!" Promiscuity had its singing laureates; Lesbian love had its thin voices; and love's perversions reached public utterance. One lover saw the cure for love's monotony in complete freedom for both parties to the mating.

Love of children had its pros and its antis. War was reviled by every poet of prominence; patriotism developed an unpleasant aroma; the state of politics was as low as the water level of the Dead Sea. Love broadened to include all men, all animals, all life, all things.

The age grew increasingly sensitive to beauty. Voice after voice was lifted in its praise; even though the menu for the ordinary provided, not beauty, but noodle soup. The spirituals, the wildest extravaganzas of jazz music and dancing, were extolled. Beauty was implicit in much of the nature poetry.

The gods grew unpopular. Some voices still hoped for god, or at least personal immortality; but the clamor grew in favor of immortality without consciousness, in dust and flowers and animals: for vegetable immortality, to use William Norman Guthrie's sharp phrase. Labor as a rule flung the gods overboard, seeking to claim Jesus as a man allied to its protests.

Science and intellectual desires met a jangling reception. The mossbacks hated intelligence; and education in practice pleased few. Nor did the conduct of the professors and scientists win acclaim. Thought was held to be still servant to the unconscious emotions; but more attention was given to it.

And the whole chorus yearned nostalgically toward youth; toward the forests as against the citified culture; and toward death. Death had her utter lovers: and many of them did more than sing it. The right to suicide, or to euthanasia—death made socially easy—did not lack its singers.

So much for the present.

The astonishing thing about the poetry of this or of any land is that, barring a few audacious assumptions, it deals with facts which exist. The land exists; its people exist; their desires exist; these find expressions, sooner or later, in actions. These desires, these actions, alter from age to age, from decade to decade. If no poetry existed, these desires would still exist: these actions would still flow from them.

Poetry is one of the forms of publicity for the desires.

Art is the expression, in comparatively permanent form, of desires found socially acceptable. Poetry is that art which uses words arranged in a definite pattern for its medium. It is a crystallization of desire.

Can we read the future from the poetry of yesterday and today?

Yes, because desires crystallize somehow into actions. The whole will be blurred: a tidal wave, an intercontinental earthquake, a world war, might alter the picture. But the main tendencies can be seen.

How does the future appear, from these singing voices?

First of all, there has been little change. The sonnet *Progress* stated the situation. No matter how much the external environment has altered from man's beginnings to Greece; from Greece to Rome; from Rome to the Middle Ages; from that hour to Plymouth Rock, Yorktown, Appomattox, Manila Bay, the Marne, Lindbergh's flight and marriage, man has remained largely the same.

He still desires food, and he eats. He still requires shelter, and he seeks it. He still quivers to love, in some form, and he achieves it. He still develops a broadening love, and a desire for war or a civilized conquest of this desire. He still wishes for beauty, for that emotional satisfaction called religion, for wisdom, for a return to youth and, in the end, to death. These things endure.

The copper-hued American Indian had the first two of these, something of the third, the fourth, the fifth, the seventh. Only the desire for wisdom was entirely rudimentary in him. Modern man has developed no new desires, though he has carried the leaning toward beauty and wisdom further than any earlier ages.

But that idea, that man has stood still in the main, does not aid us much. It is true in the large; it is untrue in small. Ten years ago lacked the developed radio, the ideas of Einstein, the talking cinema, the ocean-conquering airplane, the tabloid newspaper, and many other accepted details of today's living. Ten years from now will have its fresh developed marvels, stranger than any of these. And a hundred years from now. . . .

Let us survey this song, from the colonial period to today, with an idea of sketching the future in view. The sketch must be entirely tentative. Its tendencies will be caught; its details multi-bodied man must work out.

We will take these desires up, one by one. . . .

i.

Man has partly conquered the general need of food, by increasingly providing it for all. This will be accomplished; utter poverty will be wiped out.

The mechanical age will flourish on, with more and more acceptance from the singers.

Oppressions like capitalism and race prejudice will end. The swine-greed of the oppressors is firmly entrenched, no doubt of that. But it lacks singing approbation; and this means that, in the not far distant future, the oppressed, the sensitives—poets and others—and the followers of accepted moral codes will end the evil of oppression. Let me correct this: the oppressed, with slim aid from without, will end this. This sounds Utopian. It is not this writer speaking: it is what you have read and must read in the land's poetry, which is a sound clinical thermometer in the mouth of America, showing its temperature and the tendencies of its diseases toward cure or the reverse.

Then food, shelter, and a pleasing environment will increasingly be the lot of all.

ii.

This is the first age where the eccentricities of sex have become vocal, in America at least. What will tomorrow do with these, and with normal love?

Present-day monogamic marriage has failed, the land's poetry says. This will be cured, by liberality for both parties to the agreement. Avoidable and sought-for unhappiness in life is abnormal, except in the case of abnormal people, those who desire suffering, and find their happiness in it. This, in marriage, will go, except in rare cases.

Virginity will not be called sacred in the future. Birth control will come, and a wider spread of promiscuity, socially acceptable, with no social blame on either party. So the land's poetry says.

Variations of the love passion will not be condemned as they are today; they will be regarded as sterile throwbacks, and will be permitted, without any applause from the crowd. Harmful variations, like assault, infliction of cruelty, and the like, must meet a social penalty; for they involve injury to the rights of others.

iii.

Love of children and family, not too lauded today, may better as family organization becomes more sensible. Otherwise, there must be a wholesale revision of the system, or a continuance of hatred of all relatives. War is doomed. Again this sounds Utopian: but the almost unanimous cry of the poets announce this as one of man's near steps.

Love of all men, of all life, of all things, will grow, until it suffuses a majority of the race.

iv.

Beauty will come into its own, in woodland and city life, in homes and industry. Man's soul increasingly demands this: he will achieve this demand.

v.

The gods seem doomed, except for a lessening group who cling to yesterday at all cost. They are regarded as needful illusions of man's youth.

vi.

Intelligence, and the search for truth, will dominate. Not subject, as today, to the demands of a living, of corporation-head trustees or next month's bills: but sought for their own sakes.

vii.

The cry toward one's youth continues, less virulently than ever before. It is still present. It may grow less, as tomorrow's todays grow more civilized and happiness-producing.

Death will still be sought. The tendency indicates that one's right to end his own life, by self-killing or by an easy death socially provided, will ultimately be achieved. When life is made healthier and more happiness-producing, the desire for early death may be pushed forward. Toward old age, it will become common, and socially regarded as moral.

Unsatisfactory, you say?
Or partly satisfactory?
Or wholly so?

Each to his own interpretation. Each man, tomorrow, must be his own legislature. Each man may be so today, to an increasing extent.

Heaven will be built on earth tomorrow: as it has been in each age of the past. It will be always a partial heaven, moved by desires for further improvements which point to a further heaven to be striven for.

Heaven may be built on earth today. The hunters of heaven do not always secure only a Nebo glimpse of it, before mating with the final dark lover. There are those who have built their heavens upon the rock of solid earth.

I have so built mine.

THE END



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